



CAGED SLAVE

密室の虜

Written by Yuiko Takamura
Illustrated by An Kanae

June

Yaoi



Novel

"Room 2703," the man whispered into Tsukasa's ear as he walked away from the counter. "Huh?" Tsukasa exclaimed to himself...He couldn't believe that he was being hit on by a high-class guy in a high-class hotel.

Tsukasa Shinozaki is a devoted secretary, performing above and beyond the call of duty. Way beyond the call of duty. Yes, Tsukasa has fallen into that time-honored trap of a secretary falling for the boss.

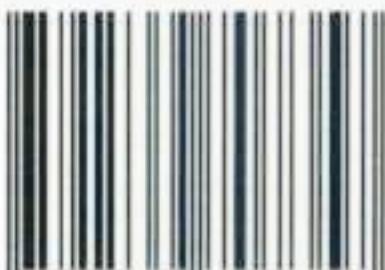
Unfortunately, his is not a Cinderella story – reality intrudes as Tsukasa gets dumped when his ambitious boss marries the company president's daughter. Wounded and lonely, Tsukasa ends up at a hotel bar where he hooks up with a beautiful mystery man who gives him more pleasure than he has ever known possible. They share several passion-filled nights, but there's a catch: the man refuses to reveal his name.

How will Tsukasa find his happily ever after if Prince Charming won't even introduce himself?

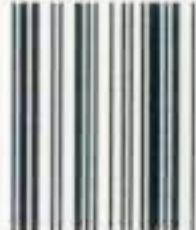
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Tsukasa grabbed hold of the man's necktie and pulled him closer. He forced the taller man to lean down and meet his mouth in a punishing kiss.

CAGED SLAVE

牢の威

Written By

Yuiko Takamura

Birthday: June 12th

Blood Type: B+

Recently, I went to the vet and encountered a pelican.
A pelican, a pelican! It was such a shock—I couldn't
believe someone would have such a big bird for a pet! If
you think about it—maybe it came from the zoo?!

Illustrated By

An Kanae

Birthday: June 4th

Blood Type: B+

I just got a brand new Mac to start working with. I'm
not much of an expert, so I'm caressing and babying it
to keep it working properly. But I guess that's the thing
about us Mac users...(laughs)

<http://www.k4.dion.ne.jp/~apricott>

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Los Angeles



Tokyo

Chapter 1

Tsukasa Shinozaki sat all alone at the hotel bar counter as the night deepened outside. He stared at the untouched glass of bourbon in front of him. It was rapidly growing watery and pale. As he watched the ice cubes melt, he wondered what it would take to fill the emptiness inside him.

"When will I stop picking losers," he thought. The strains of an Eric Satie melody sluggishly spiraled throughout the room and deepened Tsukasa's feeling of gloom.

For one entire year, happiness had been within his grasp. But a month earlier, the man Tsukasa thought he was in love with had dumped him, choosing to further his career by marrying the only daughter of the company president.

"Men are only good for sex," he had told Tsukasa at the end. "Go out and find someone new. Maybe he can warm up that frigid ass of yours."

Tsukasa had been about to run after his lover, but the cruel words had stopped him short, breaking over him like a cold shower.

No matter how hard Tsukasa tried, he just couldn't make himself feel any pleasure from anal sex. His lover had tormented and bullied Tsukasa about it up until the day they had parted.

And yet Tsukasa had to admit that he had known

from the beginning that this man, who had treated him so cruelly and unfeelingly, had felt no love for him. Tsukasa's feelings had been true, but to his lover, he had been nothing more than an outlet for improper desires, a piece of ass that presented no risk of pregnancy and wouldn't pressure him for marriage.

"I tried so damned hard to like it," came the tortuous thought.

Tsukasa had pretended not to notice his lover's true nature simply because he hadn't *wanted* to see it.

"I'm such an idiot."

It had been years since Tsukasa, in the first blush of adolescence, had realized that he only felt desire for his own sex. Now, at almost 25, he wondered why he found himself in the same situation over and over again.

Sighing, he brushed aside his pale, silk-like bangs. His profile looked delicate in its sorrow. Thick, long eyelashes fringed deep, amber-colored eyes above a narrow, finely formed nose and a beautifully shaped mouth. Anyone looking at him would have wondered how someone so exquisitely beautiful could have such rotten luck with men.

But no matter how much it hurt, how much he cried, there was nothing Tsukasa could do — he simply lacked judgment when it came to men. A lot of them were drawn to his looks, so why was it that he only chose the losers who used and abandoned him?

Generalizing things by saying "I only pick losers," couldn't even begin to contain the hurt he had suffered and which, even now, refused to leave him.

The man who had most recently dumped Tsukasa had been his boss. When they had separated, Tsukasa had found himself devastated and not wanting to see the man ever again. But things had only gotten worse; he had been demoted to a pointless, dead-end job that he hated. His personal and professional lives being destroyed in one blow left Tsukasa bereft, empty, and uninterested in his meaningless existence. Who could blame him for trying to block out his pain by patrolling the city at night, desperately craving for human touch?

But nothing brought him any satisfaction. Once he had stopped by Shinjuku's gay quarter, but not finding anyone interesting, he had found himself chasing away the men who had approached him one after another. It seemed like nothing good would ever happen to him again. Tsukasa longed to be healed, but was too cowardly to accept one night of comfort in a stranger's arms. Yet, the thought of being alone was unbearable and so he had stumbled into this hotel in the middle of the night. He now haunted the bar counter and cursed himself for his stupidity. No way would a guy walk into a big fancy hotel like this and try to pick him up.

"I guess I should just go home," he thought to himself. *"I've got to be at work at five in the morning."*

Then Tsukasa realized that it was Friday night. Back when he still cared about his job, he hadn't minded working on weekends. Now his two days of rest were nothing more than a vast expanse of time, empty of a lover who might lend it meaning.

"There's no point in going back to my room alone," he decided, tossing back his watery bourbon

to quench the emptiness and irritation that mingled within him. Getting stinking drunk suddenly seemed like a good idea. Though in reality, Tsukasa had learned many times during the last horrible month that when the drunkenness passed, he felt at least three times worse than before. He had no tolerance when it came to alcohol and always felt like shit before finally passing out.

"It's pretty lame when even getting drunk doesn't help," he thought. Sitting there in front of his empty glass, he despised himself for his cowardice.

"Two bourbons on the rocks, please," a seductive, compelling voice rang out, startling Tsukasa from his reverie. "One for me and one for him."

Tsukasa lifted his head and saw a man, who appeared to be in his mid 30s, sitting two stools away from him. He had lustrous black hair and sharp, manly features that didn't look like they belonged to a Japanese person. His tasteful, high-quality suit made him seem like he had just stepped out from the pages of a fashion magazine and had no business sitting here in the real world. His legs stretched all the way from the tall stool to the floor with room to spare, belying his impressive height.

The man stared at Tsukasa with jet-black eyes even darker than the night outside. Tsukasa, heart pounding wildly, couldn't tear his gaze away. He knew he should refuse the glass of bourbon that the bartender passed him, but he felt like a frog entranced by a snake, unable to escape.

As Tsukasa sat there frozen, the man brought his own glass to his mouth in one refined movement and drank.

The man finished his drink after 5 or 10 minutes and stood up. Tsukasa was totally entranced, captivated by the man's tempting presence.

"Room 2703," the man whispered into Tsukasa's ear as he walked away from the counter.

"Huh?" Tsukasa exclaimed to himself. Tiny shivers raced through him like a fever, and hot, melting desire welled up inside his body. He had never felt such a strong physical reaction towards another person, it was as if his heart was about to burst from his chest. He couldn't believe that he was being hit on by a high-class guy in a high-class hotel.

"No way," he thought. "*This must be some kind of mistake...*"

But Tsukasa's reason and good sense were soon overwhelmed by powerful temptation. Ten minutes after the mystery man made his exit, Tsukasa left the bar himself.

The high-speed elevator quickly brought Tsukasa to the 27th floor.

"Here it is," he thought, standing in front of room 2703. For a moment, indecision warred with desire. Then desire won out and Tsukasa knocked on the door.

Without a word, the man ushered Tsukasa inside. As soon as the door clicked shut, they fell upon each other like starving beasts.

"Oh...yes..." Tsukasa gasped.

They kissed as if to devour each other. Practiced

hands removed Tsukasa's suit jacket. Tsukasa greedily sucked the man's tongue as his belt was pulled off and his pants' zipper tugged down. Impatient hands groped for his manhood and began stroking it with wild abandon.

"Ahh..." Tsukasa moaned.

"You're so close," the man said.

Tsukasa panted, shocked by his own excitement. He heard the humor in the man's words, but couldn't argue the truth of them. He could barely believe that he was here in the arms of a man he had met only 30 minutes ago. Yet, strangely, he felt no doubts, nothing but a fire building inside that threatened to burn him to ashes.

Impatiently, Tsukasa used his teeth to nip the man's tongue. He was picked up, still wearing his rumpled clothes, and carried to the double bed.

"Do you like it rough?" the man asked, gazing down at Tsukasa lying on the bed. His black eyes glimmered like those of a carnivore that had just captured a tasty snack.

The man's face was full of amusement as he slowly peeled off his suit jacket and unwound the tie from his neck. The springs squeaked loudly as he kneeled on the bed. Passion made Tsukasa's mind go blank and he could do nothing but gasp.

With his eyes never leaving Tsukasa, the man brought his hands to his shirt. He undid the buttons, revealing a perfectly formed abdomen covered with tight, supple muscles.

Tsukasa stared at him enviously, longing to

reach out and stroke those muscles with his fingers. But the man caught his wrists and forced Tsukasa's arms up above his head, tugging off Tsukasa's necktie and using it to bind Tsukasa's hands.

"What...what are you doing?" Tsukasa asked, slightly shocked by the sudden kinky turn the encounter had taken. But the restraint didn't bite into his wrists painfully, so he felt reassured that it was all in good fun.

"Don't worry," the man said. "Ecstasy is the only thing you'll feel."

Hearing the man's deep voice whispering into his ear, Tsukasa moaned again. He tried to move his hands, but they were held fast.

The man's long fingers began to leisurely undo Tsukasa's buttons. Tsukasa was momentarily embarrassed, afraid to reveal his own slim, weak body, so different from his mystery lover's. Yet the man seemed to enjoy touching Tsukasa's skin, soft as the finest silk yet firm at the same time.

"You're so beautiful," the man murmured reverently. He slid his hands up Tsukasa's sides from his thighs to below his armpits.

"Ah...ah!" Tsukasa exclaimed, shivers running up his spine. The lightest touch of the man's hands on his bare skin brought him to heights of almost unbearable pleasure. "Ohhh..."

"You're so sensitive," the man said.

Tsukasa groaned as the man brushed a thumb over the cherry blossom-pink nipples that adorned his chest. He had no clue why he felt like this. Was it



because he had been starved for physical touch for so long? Or was it the novelty of having sex with a mystery man whose name he didn't even know?

Tsukasa didn't know why, but each time the man touched him, his body burned as if he was feverish. He quickly grew hard and his nipples blushed into crimson roses as the man licked them with his tongue. His underwear was already shamefully damp just from the man's touch on his chest, and his bound position contorted his body uncomfortably.

The man placed his hands on Tsukasa's hips again. He tore off Tsukasa's pants and underwear in one decisive motion.

Tsukasa's member stood tall and needy, stretching towards his white stomach.

"What an eager little boy," the man said. Tsukasa moaned.

"You seem to like being exposed like this," the man said, his voice full of amusement as he teased Tsukasa for his embarrassment.

Tsukasa couldn't hide the liquid that dripped impudently down there.

"Knowing I'm watching you makes you excited, doesn't it?" asked the man.

"No!" Tsukasa protested shyly, trying to twist away. "Don't look!"

The man refused to allow Tsukasa to demur. "I'm going to make you feel even better."

"Huh...what?" Tsukasa yelped as the man's big hands grabbed both of his knees and pushed them apart. Then, he nimbly slid a feather pillow underneath



Tsukasa's hips, raising him up.

"Unh!" Tsukasa, his knees spread open in invitation, groaned. His obscenely erect member trembled. The pillow lifted him up and laid all of him open to the man's gaze, from his stiffness to the bud of his asshole nestled between two firm mounds of flesh.

"No," he said again, embarrassed. "Don't!" But even as he dwelled on how humiliated he felt, the proof of his desire flowed down the length of his erection. It trickled all the way to his asshole, priming it with moisture.

"What a lovely sight," the man said.

"Ohh!" Tsukasa gasped as the man brushed the opening of his dampness with one long finger and then plunged it deep inside. A strangled cry escaped Tsukasa's mouth as the strange sensation engulfed him. But all his resistance melted away a second later when the man wrapped his lips around Tsukasa's throbbing shaft. He rhythmically sucked the sensitive tip, and then skillfully laved the small opening there with the tip of his tongue.

At the same time, the man's finger made lazy circles around Tsukasa's asshole, stroking his inner walls, boldly reaching deeper. Pleasure crashed into Tsukasa from all sides, making him dizzy and totally unable to protest further. A second finger slid inside, joining the first.

"Ha...ah...haaaah!" Tsukasa panted. The invasion into his body made his mind go totally blank, made him fall prey to the mystery man's desires.

When the man's fingertip found the special spot hidden inside, Tsukasa couldn't help himself. He

exploded into the man's mouth.

"Aa-aaahhh!" he cried. Yet, he was allowed no respite — the man continued to stroke and explore the secret depths of Tsukasa's body.

"Does this feel good?" the man asked.

Tsukasa could only manage another moan in response.

The man's jet-black eyes narrowed in obvious satisfaction as he withdrew his fingers. He positioned himself between Tsukasa's raised knees.

"This will feel even nicer," he said.

Seeing the man's staff about to thrust inside him, Tsukasa realized there was no turning back. He couldn't deny the mystery man his own release. But Tsukasa, who had never felt any pleasure at all from anal sex, wished fervently that he could put a halt to what was to come next. And the man's rock-hard staff, which even now pushed at the entrance to his anus, was definitely much bigger than those of the other men he had been with.

"No," Tsukasa said fearfully. "I...I can't! There's no way..." He knew that he had no right to be so selfish, but he couldn't help trying to wriggle away.

Tsukasa's previous lover would become frustrated and mercilessly pound into Tsukasa, seeking his own completion. Tsukasa had no idea how this mystery man, who had picked him up for sex, would react to rejection. Would he lash out in violence, too?

"I did this," Tsukasa thought. *"Now I have to pay the price."* He resigned himself to dealing with the pain that would surely come when the man, who had a firm hold on Tsukasa's hips, shoved himself inside his

tiny opening.

"You've got to relax," the man said.

Tsukasa let out a giant breath.

"There's no need to be scared," the mystery man continued. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Just as he said it, he eased in gently and began a shallow series of thrusts, allowing Tsukasa to become accustomed to the movement.

Tsukasa gasped.

"Does that feel good?" the man asked.

"Unn...uh..." The slow, gentle grind made Tsukasa grunt loudly, but not from pain.

"Just relax." The man paused to let Tsukasa's body open for him, and then began his tender invasion anew. The skillful timing of his movement was surprisingly tolerable.

Tsukasa continued to cry out. As the man finally plunged into his very depths, Tsukasa felt his hips begin to quiver. He pushed himself up again and again, relishing the sweet friction. A sensation he had never felt before was welling up in his member.

He moaned again, shocked by what was happening to his own body. He took the man in deeper than he had imagined possible, feeling like he was about to shake apart. A strange melting feeling bloomed within him. Tsukasa realized that it was pleasure, once the man began to move his hips.

As the man thrust in and out, Tsukasa's insides cried out in bliss. The tight slide was unbearable and wonderful all at the same time. He would have thought his asshole would be raw and painful, but it wasn't. Each



movement was accompanied by wet, erotic sounds.

"Aa...aa...aahhhh..." Tsukasa cried out, overtaken by pure sensation. His pale white body was bent almost entirely backwards. A strange numbness ran along his torso from his hips to his spine, and his skin broke out into gooseflesh. Nothing mattered, but the taste of this pleasure.

"More...more," he pleaded, totally out of control. He wanted to be taken again and again until the flame building in him had been extinguished.

Tsukasa ended up getting even more than he had begged for. As if he had been waiting for just those words, the man rode him harder, devouring Tsukasa like a starving beast.

"I'm coming," the man rasped out. He went faster, pierced mercilessly into Tsukasa's very core. Each time he hit that one sensitive spot, Tsukasa almost fainted.

"Ah...I can't take it! I'm going to unravel!" Tsukasa cried. It was all too much. He couldn't handle the pleasure. He was afraid he was going to break into pieces.

He couldn't bear the feeling any more. He exploded again, his honey gushing onto his own stomach between his spread knees. A second later, he felt an answering tide of warmth from his lover.

Sensation unlike any he had ever known broke over him, Tsukasa's mind went totally empty. Shivers wracked his lewdly splayed body, and he felt wrung out and dizzy with release.

A few hours passed and Saturday morning dawned.

Tsukasa woke up in the big bed, wondering how long it had been since he had slept so well. When he tried to remember the events of the night before, his memories scattered and flew away, hovering just beyond his grasp. But the traces and marks around his hips eloquently conveyed what had happened.

The persistent despair and self-hatred that had been with him until yesterday had vanished in the morning light.

"No way," he thought. "*This has to be a dream.*"

Yet the mystery man who had shared the dream with him was still in the hotel room, his back to Tsukasa as he looked in the mirror and wound his tie about his neck.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

He looked even more perfect and tempting in the daylight. His posture bespoke a mature charm.

"I can't believe that a guy like this was with me last night."

Embarrassed, Tsukasa met the man's gaze in the mirror and pulled the sheets up to his nose to hide his flushed cheeks.

The man smiled and approached the bed.

"Go ahead and sleep some more," he said. "You can use the room until 1:00 p.m."

Tsukasa watched the man pick up his suit jacket and was attracted to him anew.

The man made to leave and Tsukasa realized that



he had no intention of revealing his name. He probably saw no need to divulge it to someone he had picked up at a bar in the middle of the night and had a one night stand with, but Tsukasa couldn't stand the thought of parting that way. Even though he knew it might sound annoying, he decided he had to ask.

"Umm..." he said, unthinkingly reaching out and grabbing the hem of the man's suit. The man looked over his shoulder and turned his jet-black gaze on Tsukasa.

Tsukasa summoned his courage and continued. "Uh...please tell me your name?"

The time it took for the man to open his mouth and respond seemed impossibly long. Tsukasa knew he was out of his element, but he had to risk it.

The man's words, when they came, were not a response to Tsukasa's question.

"I'll reserve this room for the same time next week."

"Huh?"

"If you feel like it, stop by," the man said simply, and left the room, leaving Tsukasa alone with his thoughts.

Truly the world was a different place than it had been only yesterday.

"Next week...at the same time...in this room!"

Tsukasa clutched his knees to his chest, the man's words echoed over and over again in his head.

It was morning at the Tokyo headquarters of Dai Tech, a large commercial company that dealt with foreign imports.

For every salaried worker, Monday morning brought a twinge of unhappiness. Tsukasa Shinozaki, whose time with Dai Tech would soon stretch into three years, was spending part of that time in an underground reference room buried under an enormous mountain of papers.

"Where are the rest of those papers from 1960?" he muttered. Here in the second basement level, there was no one to hear Tsukasa complain about his meaningless job. Considering how much he hated this job, it would probably make sense to just quit. But doing so would be like admitting that he had made a mistake, and that was hard for Tsukasa to swallow.

After graduating from college, Tsukasa had decided to take a job at Dai Tech because he had studied abroad and knew a little bit about linguistics. Dealing with foreign countries had sounded interesting, but after his orientation, he had been assigned not to the Sales Division, but to the Secretarial Division in the General Affairs Department.

Even though he had started out as the lowest man on the totem pole, one of the section presidents had taken notice of Tsukasa. He had ended up spending busy days in the highest echelons of the company, taking in the magnificent view from center stage. Most new employees had to spend a period of time doing menial work, but Tsukasa had shot to the top relatively quickly.

The reason he had fallen so low now was his illicit affair with Yutaka Konishi, who had transferred from Dai Tech's branch office in Hong Kong last year and became the president of the Secretarial Division.

"Everyone in Hong Kong loved talking to you on the phone," Konishi had said. "Not just because you're fluent, but because your voice is so sexy. Seeing you in person makes me think that there will be some benefits to being transferred here."

Looking back now, Tsukasa could clearly see how conceited that pick-up line really was.

In some ways, Tsukasa still behaved like a naïve college student. He got along with people well, did his work efficiently, and he was clever. The 30-year-old Konishi, who longed to reach the very top, had seemed glamorous and attractive to him. He had probably fallen for Konishi's tricks because he had been fresh from university and hadn't known much about the world. Or maybe it was just because Tsukasa, like an idiot, always managed to pick losers.

While doing overtime in the office one night, Tsukasa had given in to Konishi's blatant invitations. For a whole year, they had concealed the homosexual relationship between the boss and his employee from the rest of the department, which had been no small feat. Tsukasa had been devoted both to Konishi, his boss, and to Konishi, his lover. Their hidden relationship had filled his days with poignant happiness.

That is, he had been happy until the day a month ago when Konishi had dropped the bomb on him.

"What a jerk," Tsukasa thought as the painful memories choked him up anew.

Three months ago, Toshihide Ookawa, Dai

Tech's president, had suddenly passed away at the relatively young age of 57. The shock had thrown the company into turmoil. Tsukasa's secretarial team, which had served the president, had been besieged by so much work that they barely had a moment to breathe.

Throughout those hectic days, Konishi had been secretly concocting a plan that would bring him the promotion he so fervently desired. When he had put it into practice, Tsukasa had been utterly devastated.

Erina Ookawa, the only daughter of the president, had been distraught by her father's death. Not too long after, she and Konishi had been engaged.

For years, the same family had run Dai Tech, so losing Toshihide had been a terrible blow. His predecessor, Genzou Ookawa was still alive, but, at 85, was too old to want to take the reins again. He formally adopted Erina as his heir and they began to work out plans for the future.

For a power-hungry man like Konishi, taking advantage of a 20-year-old female college student was like taking candy from a baby.

So Konishi had dumped Tsukasa. Even if Tsukasa had been a potential obstacle on his road to success, it had seemed unduly cruel of Konishi to demote him to this stupid job. Tsukasa fell from the Presidential Office on the top floor to the basement reference room. He had needed no further proof of how Konishi felt about him.

Up until last week, he had been depressed, convinced he had no luck with men, and had been full of resentment towards his dead-end job. But this week, he

felt like a new man.

Obviously, the change in him could only have been caused by one thing: the dream-like night he had spent with a mystery man whose name he didn't even know.

Alone and surrounded by dusty papers, Tsukasa rested his chin in his hands and wondered how this could have happened to him. He was thankful that no one was around to see him as he ignored his work and obsessively replayed scenes from Friday night. The man's beautiful hands and long fingers. His sweetly seductive voice. His graceful chest, banded with taut muscles...

"Ah", Tsukasa thought silently. Behind his closed eyelids, fragments of memory rose up and then floated away. He could almost imagine that he was pinned by the man's jet-black eyes. Heat began to pool in the depths of his body. It was embarrassing to remember some of the things that had happened as he had been tied up on that bed.

"Being penetrated has never felt like that before," he mused. Shame made him flush red all the way down to his nape. Tsukasa buried his face in his hands.

Up until now, anal sex had been something he merely tolerated for Konishi's sake. While Konishi had been thrusting away, lost to the world, Tsukasa had taken to working his own stiffness just to distract himself from the pain and discomfort. He enjoyed having his asshole caressed with fingers or a tongue, but he could never get any pleasure from the penetration itself. Tsukasa could hardly believe that he had come without stroking

himself, that it had felt so very good.

"I guess that's what people mean when they talk about physical chemistry," he thought. Pornographic images filled his head and made him remember the fierce, but kind and skillful way the mystery man had held him. Tsukasa knew that their relationship wasn't supposed to last, but one night didn't seem nearly enough to quench his passion. He sighed, remembering.

Of course, he had a chance to make it last more than just one night.

"I'll reserve this room for the same time next week," the man had said. *"If you feel like it, stop by."*

Without even divulging his name, the man had taken off.

"He must have liked me," Tsukasa thought. But he had a hard time understanding what the man was thinking. "If you feel like it" must mean, "If you feel like sleeping with me again." Just thinking of a repeat performance made his heart pound.

To give in to lust not just once, but twice with a man who had picked him up at a bar was not something Tsukasa felt particularly comfortable with. Tsukasa wasn't a prude, but he had only ever slept with men he made the mistake of dating. Having a "sex buddy" was unthinkable to him. Sleeping with a man whose name he didn't even know was even worse.

"I can't." He trembled, shaking his head vehemently. *"It would be a mistake."*

He had been depressed and miserable and had given in to temptation. But if he did it a second time, he would no longer be able to make excuses to himself.

Being dumped by Konishi and then suffering misfortune at work had made him give in to despair and self-hatred. He was such an idiot. It was probably best to just brush off his night with the mystery man as a mistake and act like it had never happened.

Tsukasa clutched his head. *"What should I do?"*

The more Tsukasa thought about forgetting the man, the more vividly and relentlessly he appeared in Tsukasa's mind. Memories of their night together were branded onto his body, making him groan out loud.

Tsukasa, his mind a thousand miles away, hugged his arms close to his body. Behind his closed eyelids, jet-black eyes stared back at him. There was no way he was going to be able to pretend that Friday night had never happened. It was the first time in his life he had ever thrown off all restraints and given himself up to desire and pure pleasure.

Knowing that he had a second chance to taste bliss, how could he forget how good they had been together?

"Next week...at the same time...in this room!"

The man's invitation to a second tryst sounded in Tsukasa's head over and over again, relentlessly tempting. Closeted in a basement room all alone where time ceased to have any meaning, Tsukasa was consumed with anxiety.



Chapter 2

A week passed, filled with anguish and indecision. Just like the last time, desire won out over reason. Nursing a bitter sense of defeat, Tsukasa found himself standing in front of room 2703 once again.

The second the man opened the door, bitterness turned into something much sweeter.

"Ahhh..." Tsukasa gasped as the man grabbed hold of his slim wrists. He was pulled into the room, where the last traces of his resistance melted away.

Tsukasa grabbed hold of the man's necktie and pulled him closer. He forced the taller man to lean down and meet his mouth in a punishing kiss. Being with a man whose name he didn't even know emboldened him, made him throw away all of his usual doubts and worries. In this secret room where they shared their desire, Tsukasa was a slave to his own passion. And that was probably exactly what the man wanted.

Tsukasa licked the man's neck and grabbed at his belt.

"You're already so turned on," the man noticed.

"I don't...know—" Tsukasa yelped as the man grabbed hold of his rear and trailed a finger along his pants' seam. "Oh!"

The man's finger ground against Tsukasa's asshole through the cloth, making him gasp for breath.

"No!" he cried. "Not there—"

"Why?" the man asked. "You *love* being touched there."

"No—"

"Oh, I get it," the man whispered happily. "You want something more than a finger in there."

Tsukasa wanted to argue, but he knew it was pointless. He couldn't deny that he had reached bliss last time from having the man inside him. Merely thinking about it made heat race within him. There was no way Tsukasa was going to be able to deny himself a second taste of that sensual bliss. But he shook his head anyway, his lips still crushed against the man's, his arms wrapped around the man's neck.

The man grinned. "I'm going to fuck you so hard that you won't be able to walk."

Uncontrollable need arced through Tsukasa. Still entangled with the man, he fell to the bed, unwilling to part even to properly remove their clothes. The man tugged off Tsukasa's belt and wrenched down his zipper. Tsukasa writhed about like a drowning person, tormented by the constrictive feeling of his own suit.

"Don't be so impatient," the man murmured, bursting into laughter. But contrary to his own words, his hands were hurried as well, as he peeled the suit jacket from Tsukasa's prone body and yanked off his pants and underwear.

"Lift your ass for me," he said.

"No," Tsukasa protested.

"Do you want me to tie you up again?"

Tsukasa didn't answer as the man pulled his shirt off. Leaving the jacket on, he pinned Tsukasa's

arms behind him and secured them by buttoning the cuffs.

"This isn't so bad, is it?" he asked.

Tsukasa let out a gasp. Having the man see through him so easily kindled a fire of shame within him. Although he didn't particularly want to be tortured this way, all of his power to protest the lewd situation he was now experiencing, had been drained away and was instead replaced with excitement. It was enormously embarrassing to have his face pressed into a feather pillow, his ass stuck up in the air, and his hands tied behind his back. The crevice between his buttocks and his balls, twitching with desire, was open to the man's perusal.

"I can't get over how sensitive you are," the man murmured.

"Ah...ahhh..." Tsukasa moaned.

The man chuckled at Tsukasa's appearance. "I haven't even touched you yet and you're ready to burst."

He took off and tossed his suit away, pulled off his necktie, and unbuttoned his shirt.

"Should I just plunge right in?" he asked.

Tsukasa gasped, the man's words making his body tense and hard. The man's light caresses around the edge of his asshole almost made him lose it.

A startled cry burst from Tsukasa's lips when cold liquid dripped into the valley between his two cheeks.

"It's just lotion," the man assured him. "Your skin will warm it up."

"Aah...ooh..." Tsukasa groaned. The lotion dribbled right from his most sensitive place all the way to his inner thighs. Just as the man said, Tsukasa's feverish skin soon heated it.

"This is going to be even better than before."

"Aah...aah..." Tsukasa cried out throatily as the man took some of the lotion on his fingers and slid them deep inside. Using the slickness of the lotion, the fingers moved slowly in and out. Pleasure danced across Tsukasa's inner walls. Each thorough plunge was accompanied by an arousing, erotic sound.

Tsukasa didn't feel the slightest amount of pain, but the man's skillful caresses made him writhe. Tears of pleasure fell onto the feather pillow that his face was smashed up against. While the man teased his embarrassingly exposed ass, Tsukasa's thighs shook.

"Ann...ahh..."

When the man touched his back, honey poured from the tip of Tsukasa's member as if he was a child peeing. Craving even more, Tsukasa's hips began to move of their own volition. He was going to die if he couldn't untie his hands and give some attention to his erection.

"I...I can't..." he pleaded, overtaken by carnal desire.

But the man merely smiled, not taking Tsukasa's distress seriously.

"I haven't fucked you senseless yet, have I?" the man said.

"Ah...ah...I—" Tsukasa gasped out as his inner walls shuddered. The tip of the man's nail grazed his

prostate gland, causing a strange, almost unpleasant feeling. The shock made his hips shake, but didn't bring him release. The man repeated his tortuous caress twice, three times. Tsukasa bit the feather pillow, sobbing.

"Aaah...unn...annn..."

"Do you want me to make you come?"

Tsukasa answered the man's question by nodding his trembling head, which was still shoved into the pillow. His anus couldn't bear any more sweet torture. Deliriously, he wished for the man to penetrate him with one hard, deep thrust.

"Please...fuck me..." he sobbed.

In response, the man removed his finger. The sound of him pulling down his zipper reached Tsukasa's ears.

"Finally," he thought. Was there anything more humiliating than lying facedown on a pillow, ass raised, waiting for a man to take him from behind? He burned with shame, his lotion-soaked ass dripping and needy. He couldn't stop the cries of anticipation that burst forth, proving the strength of his desire.

One blessed second later, his prayers were fulfilled.

"Ah...Aaaah..."

The man thrust his staff into Tsukasa in one swift movement, making him scream. His asshole was stretched impossibly far, yet it welcomed the pleasurable invasion.

"That's the kind of response I like," the man said.

Tsukasa just groaned again.



"I'm all the way inside. You like it, don't you?"

"Aa...a...aahhh..."

"Hold on."

Each of the man's movements made a wet smacking sound that caused Tsukasa to choke out a cry. He was in a trance of pure sensation, his body out of control. When the man increased the tempo of his thrusting, Tsukasa's torso shook and he sobbed again.

"That must feel good if you're screaming like that," the man said. He mercilessly continued stroking in and out.

Crying out from a pleasure that he was sure was going to make him faint, Tsukasa was overtaken by the feelings rushing through his body.

"I'm going...to...come..." he panted.

The man's hands immediately snaked around to Tsukasa's front and grabbed his throbbing member.

"Ha...ahh..." Tsukasa moaned, overcome by intense sensation. Every part of his body, inside and out, convulsed. An erotic noise announced that they came at exactly the same time.

"Aa...aahhhh..."

As a wave of completion even more potent than the last time crashed over him, Tsukasa's mind went totally blank.

Tsukasa lay on top of the bed, spent from the lovemaking.

Sunk into an ocean of twisted sheets, he heard the sound of the shower running from the bathroom.



"Last night was the seventh time," he pondered. In his mind, he couldn't help counting the number of nights that he had spent in bed with a man who had remained a mystery even until now. After seven weeks, it seemed somehow wrong to keep referring to him as a "mystery," but Tsukasa didn't actually have a name he could use.

"All I know is the length of his dick," Tsukasa berated himself, smiling bitterly.

They met on weekends for no other purpose than sharing physical pleasure. The rest of the world may call them "sex buddies," but in all actuality, they were far from being buddies. Aside from the man's name, Tsukasa also didn't know anything about his past or even his cell phone number. The only thing that bound them was this hotel room.

"This is one messed-up, abnormal relationship." A twinge of loneliness pierced his chest. This room was what held them together, and it also guaranteed that they knew nothing about each other.

"This is just a game."

Tsukasa couldn't help, but let his mind wander to the morning of the second time he had succumbed to temptation.

"Please!" he had pleaded. "Just tell me your name!"

Tsukasa had run after the man who had, just like the first time, been about to leave the room without saying a word. Even if he had tried to dismiss the man as a mistake, the man had given Tsukasa pleasure like he had never tasted before. And so he had longed to know

his name. Otherwise, the dream they had shared together might fade from his memories.

To Tsukasa, who had been used and abandoned by men so many times, having a rendezvous like this was a whole new experience. He couldn't just forget the man he had sinned with.

"Let's meet here again next week at the same time," the man had said in reply.

"Huh? Wha...why?" A bewildered expression had floated across Tsukasa's face. The man who had stolen his heart wanted to sleep with him a third time? If so, he should probably jump at the chance. But he didn't know how to answer the man who, instead of giving his name, had offered another invitation.

The man had smiled at Tsukasa's confusion. "Whether you know my name or not, last night was amazing, wasn't it?"

"Huh?"

"We can have more fun together if we don't know anything about each other."

Tsukasa hadn't known exactly how to react to that. It was true that if he learned the mystery man's name, a little bit of reality would intrude into the dream. Next, he would probably end up learning what job he did, his age, address, whether he had a lover or a wife...he would find out everything, whether he wanted to or not. Soon, all sorts of normal details would threaten their relationship. Jealousy, possessiveness, anger, and grief would naturally grow, weakening their bond. He would have to say goodbye to the bone-melting pleasure and mind-blowing orgasms that he had been given last night.

Essentially, the man had been offering him a relationship that didn't exist in the real world. By not telling Tsukasa his name, he had assured him that their bond never went beyond this room.

Tsukasa was convinced that if he hadn't agreed, there would never have been a third time. Maybe he could have tried to refuse to follow the rules of this man who had enslaved him. But he silently obeyed, not asking the man's name, not fishing for information. On Friday nights, they had sex. That was all. He kept telling himself that it was better for him this way. When their unusual relationship ended, it wouldn't affect the rest of his life and he wouldn't be hurt. He could just think of the whole thing as waking up from a dream.

"As if I'm ever going to be able to do that." Tsukasa sighed, turning over. Each time they met here, he was stricken by misery and painful longing for his mystery man. Just being looked at by those deep black eyes made his body shake. Next week, their relationship would reach the two-month mark. The man had taken hold of his heart and refused to let go. He had become something necessary to Tsukasa's existence.

He sighed again, his grief boundless.

"Yet I knew that this was going to happen from the beginning," Tsukasa reminded himself. He had tried to convince himself that the situation was to his benefit too. But no matter how many excuses he made, he knew that he was only satisfying his body. He was scared that if he had refused the man's proposal, he would never get to see him again. So he had just silently accepted—not for his body's sake, but for his heart's. The man had

entranced Tsukasa, body and soul.

"Yet more proof that I have crappy luck with men," he thought. He couldn't deny the cruel fact that he was in love with a man who had no interest in him. *"I have no sense at all."*

No matter how much in love he was, to the man, Tsukasa was nothing more than a convenient partner in a trivial game. Tsukasa knew that he couldn't treat their relationship just as casually.

Tsukasa was often called a "cool beauty." He was blessed with an attractive appearance, but many thought of him as practically asexual, someone who wouldn't demand anything from his lover. Most people assumed from Tsukasa's good looks and cool attitude that he was somehow above normal relationships. They thought he was distant and not needy, but in truth, it was laughable how little experience Tsukasa had. He was an amateur when it came to love. He couldn't handle sleeping with someone just for fun. And the thought of having multiple lovers was totally foreign to him.

Anyone who learned his heart's desire would laugh at him and call him a naïve child, but all Tsukasa really wanted was to be loved purely by someone who was true. When men who wanted just a casual relationship learned of Tsukasa's hopes, it shattered the image they had of him and they totally lost interest. And Tsukasa, who gave his everything to making his dream come true, was dumped over and over.

If he actually listened to the lessons he had

learned, it might be easier for him to just enjoy a casual relationship. Yet, even while understanding that, he knew he couldn't change. And he knew that if his mystery man had even an inkling that Tsukasa was in love with him, he would toss Tsukasa out like yesterday's garbage.

But a person couldn't decide who they fell in love with.

"I want to know his name."

His frustrated desire to learn more about the man tore his heart to pieces. Just having mind-blowing sex with him in a secret room wasn't enough. He wanted to learn the mystery man's name, who he was. It was terrible that he knew so little about the man he loved.

"If only," Tsukasa sighed. The turmoil in his heart made him moan wordlessly.

The mystery man's Patek Philippe watch had been left next to the bed. His expensive-looking suits and the things he kept on his person led Tsukasa to think that he was very well off. Besides, no normal businessman could afford to pay for this expensive room week in and week out.

"Just his name," Tsukasa thought. *"That's all I want."*

It was very tempting to slip out of bed while the man was showering, look in his suit pocket, and try to find a business card, driver's license, or cell phone that would tell Tsukasa something about him.

"I can't do that. If I knew, I wouldn't be able to hide it...I'd probably call out his name..."

He was convinced that if he broke the rules, the man wouldn't forgive him, so Tsukasa fought off

the urge and stayed where he was. Besides, even if they were "normal" lovers, it wouldn't be right to peek into his wallet or peer at business cards and cell phones.

So while love for the man scorched Tsukasa's breast, he did nothing—just waited for their next tryst.

"Why do I have to like him so much?"

Filled with misery, Tsukasa heard the sound of the shower shutting off. Startled, he bit his lip at the thought of the man emerging. The words that would reveal his feelings were on the tip of his tongue, but he had to keep them inside somehow.

Even if the possibility of the man growing tired of him came soon, for now, if Tsukasa just played the game, the man would continue to see him.

"Just think of being with him again next week," Tsukasa reminded himself, then turned over on the bed.

At the beginning of the rainy season, for the first time since being dumped by Konishi in March, a change occurred that breathed new life into Tsukasa's tortuous work life. He was plucked from the bowels of the company and reassigned to the Secretarial Division.

"Shinozaki, you're being assigned to our new Executive Director of Sales who is coming next week," Tsukasa was told by the General Affairs Department.

"Me?"

"Is there a problem?"

"Um...no," Tsukasa answered, convinced that this circumstance was just a new type of harassment.

The new Executive Director of Sales had been

headhunted from outside of the company. Apparently, he had been the Managing Director of G.V. Consulting, a foreign-capital company. The rumors swirling around said that he was an outstanding worker.

An outsider becoming Executive Director was probably a bitter pill for the senior members of Dai Tech to swallow. President Ookawa, who had died so suddenly, had not been overly traditional. But Dai Tech had been run for a long time by the same family and was somewhat entrenched in its ways. No matter how skillful a person was, if his name wasn't Ookawa, it would be hard for him to come into this company, even if he had an excellent track record. He would definitely suffer a certain degree of alienation.

Some perverse executive must have suggested that Tsukasa become the intruder's secretary. He had only a few years of experience, and up until yesterday, had been hidden away in a basement reference room. And the new director would probably be disappointed with his inexperienced new employee. Tsukasa had no proof, but he was almost entirely sure that Konishi had been behind the whole thing.

"He must want to make me quit pretty badly." Tsukasa mused. Even though this transfer showed how much he was disliked, and would probably involve all sorts of difficulties, it was still better than fighting mountains of dusty papers in the reference room. And maybe it wouldn't be so bad if he just did his work well.

"Unlike when you used to be a secretary, this time it's going to be just you serving the Executive



Director," he was told. "Do your best and work hard."

"I understand," Tsukasa said. No matter what the person who had gotten him into this had intended, Tsukasa felt lighter and freer than he had during the four long months of Hell.

Plus, there was one other possible advantage to the transfer.

"If I'm really busy, maybe I'll be able to forget about my mystery man."

For three months, he had been filled with futile love and sorrow for a man whose name he didn't know. And when he spent five long days in an underground windowless room, it was all too easy to think about the mystery man, no matter how much it hurt.

Tsukasa was the only one to blame for bringing his personal baggage into his work life. But his secret weekend meetings with the man were the only things that brought him any relief from his messed-up life.

"This is a great opportunity! Just calm down and do your best!"

He decided to make a real effort to rescue his heart from the maze it had fallen into and to try to concentrate on his job.

One week later...

On the 11th floor of the Dai Tech headquarters in the new office that had been added next to the Sales Divisions, Tsukasa did a final check before meeting up

with his new boss.

"Business cards...list of people he has to go meet...schedule of meetings with each of the Sales Divisions...." A pleasant excitement thrummed through him as he listed them off. This early in the morning, no one else was around. In spite of being made to scream until his throat was raw on Friday night, he couldn't remember when he had felt so good on a Monday morning.

"Kouki Takeshima," he read the name of his new boss out loud from the business cards that had just arrived. Takeshima had received his Masters in Business Administration from MIT. Five years ago, after working at two consulting companies, he had been headhunted by G.V. Consulting. He had soon set a record by becoming the Managing Director in an amazingly short amount of time. Takeshima also had experience as a consultant, helping Japanese companies set up corporations. The past couple of years, he had been going back and forth between New York and Tokyo. Besides offering him the title of Executive Director, Tsukasa was sure that it had taken a huge salary to attract a man with so many amazing accomplishments under his belt.

There must have been quite a bit of opposition to bringing someone in from the outside and paying them so much. But President Ookawa, the previous president's father, planned to do as much as he could to help get the Sales Divisions on the right path. Even though Ookawa had accepted Konishi as a son-in-law, he had insisted that Konishi and Erina wait to marry until she graduated from college in two years. He had taken on the important

task of keeping everyone motivated, helping prepare for the future, and supporting each Sales Division.

"I hope I can do a good job," Tsukasa thought. The future seemed threatening and full of troubles, but he hoped that his new job would be as fulfilling as when he had been a rookie member of the president's Secretarial Division.

"In just two hours, I'll see my new boss' face for the first time."

Much later, Tsukasa realized that the period before meeting the new Executive Director was the last peaceful, happy time he was to know for a long time.

At precisely 10:00 a.m., the Presidential Office called to tell him that the special meeting where the new director would take up his post was over.

"Okay, I'm coming up right now," Tsukasa said, hanging up the phone. He stepped into the executive elevator that he hadn't ridden in a very long time and soon arrived on the top floor.

What occurred next was a total shock.

"Good morning," Tsukasa said, bowing. "I'm the secretary appointed to the Executive Director of Sales..."

When he raised his head, his greeting died in his throat. What he saw with his widely open deep amber eyes was a familiar form.

"No way."

Shock slammed into him, making his jaw hang open slackly.

Before Tsukasa's eyes stood the man whom he should only see on Friday nights—the mystery man

whose name he hadn't known up until today.

"I'm Takeshima," the man said. "Nice to meet you."

That familiar, heady voice rang out in Tsukasa's ears as he stood stock-still.

Tsukasa stood utterly frozen as the man stared at him with jet-black eyes as dark as night.

The first five days passed by in a dizzying blur. Tsukasa worked by himself at a desk set up near Takeshima's office on the 11th floor. Although the Sales Divisions were close by, his desk was separated from it by a partition, which meant that he wasn't anywhere near Konishi.

"Please, Manager Kinoshita," Tsukasa said into the telephone. "It doesn't matter how long it takes, but I really need those numbers today."

Tsukasa was thoroughly annoyed as he hung the phone up. He had lost count of how many times he had asked Kinoshita, the head of Sales Division Three, to submit the papers he needed. He glanced at his wristwatch.

"6:00 p.m. already?"

Takeshima spent his days out with the heads of the five Sales Divisions, and visiting with and greeting clients. He was scheduled to return in about 30 minutes. At 7:30 p.m., Takeshima and President Ookawa would have a dinner meeting with the head of one of Dai Tech's member banks. In the 15 minutes between, Tsukasa had to fill Takeshima in on the happenings of the day, explain his schedule for next week, and provide him with the



necessary paperwork.

"Well, I'm probably not going to be able to give him the papers until next week..." Tsukasa sighed, staring at the wreckage that was his desk. Over and over, he was besieged by requests for cancellations and changes. Everything on his schedule was pending, and he was surrounded by a flood of memo-tagged papers.

There weren't currently any major problems, but Tsukasa wasn't able to carry out his job of collecting paperwork as efficiently as he had hoped. And the Executive Director of Sales was a new position that President Ookawa had created, so he had no precedence to draw on to tell him what to do. Back when he had worked on the president's Secretarial Division, he had been busy, but had never imagined how hard it would be to do a job without any bosses to instruct him or peers to consult with.

He could deal with not receiving any guidance if it weren't for dealing with the Sales Divisions, who totally refused to cooperate. Even if he came in on the weekends, he didn't think he'd be able to finish up. No matter how many times he requested data, the Sales Divisions didn't respond. Tsukasa knew he wasn't being taken seriously. Although they jumped to obey requests from the Presidential Office, they were doing everything they could to make Tsukasa's job difficult.

Having lost his status as secretary to the president, Tsukasa was yet again a powerless rookie who only had three years of experience. So when he asked the Sales Divisions to expend a little effort, they didn't exactly jump at his command.

The worst of them all was Mr. Kinoshita, the manager of Division Three. While everyone else in the Divisions made up excuses and reasons for delay, Kinoshita didn't even make any effort to hide the fact that he didn't like Tsukasa. And thanks to him, Tsukasa's work was always late.

"I guess there's nothing I can do," he thought. He realized that he had been blessed to have the Presidential Office supporting him, and that he was really lucky to be able to work like this again. He didn't intend to let his new job be spoiled. If everything had gone smoothly, these five days would have been wonderful.

Except, of course, for the biggest problem of all: Kouki Takeshima.

"*He's back,*" Tsukasa noticed. Takeshima had just arrived with the manager of Sales Division One. Without intending to, Tsukasa stood up, his heart thudding wildly.

Since becoming Takeshima's employee five days ago, he hadn't been able to decide how he should act. And, understandably, Takeshima hadn't said a single word about their three months of secret rendezvous. Tsukasa was thankful that he hadn't brought the subject up at work, yet his feelings towards Takeshima were all jumbled up. He had learned the name he wanted so badly to know, but he couldn't do anything about it.

For better or for worse, they hardly interacted at work—Takeshima's week had been stuffed with meetings with each internal division head and going out to meet clients, so they spent only about 20 or 30 minutes in the afternoon or evening together.

For Tsukasa, the most important pending matter he had to deal with was Kouki Takeshima's very existence.

"Good work today," Tsukasa greeted Takeshima with a blank face, his insides churning. At times like these, his cool façade took over, and he became nothing but a competent, beautiful secretary. No one noticed that beneath his attractive visage seethed a torrent of passion.

"Your meeting with the head of Touzai Bank is, as planned, at 7:30 p.m. The Secretarial Division says that you are to ride in the company car together, so please make sure you're at the underground parking garage in 10 minutes. As for next week's schedule...." The words tumbled out of his mouth quickly as he took the day's crop of business cards from Takeshima.

While listening to Tsukasa's announcements, Takeshima made a quick check of his mail and his inbox, confirming what matters were still pending.

"There's really nothing urgent, is there?" he asked.

"Umm...no," Tsukasa replied.

There was not enough time before Takeshima left to go to the parking garage for Tsukasa to apologize for not submitting his paperwork on time. In any case, even if he had turned them in, Takeshima probably wouldn't get to look at them until next week anyway.

"Today is Friday already," Tsukasa thought. Inwardly, he breathed a sigh of relief.

It was the first Friday since he had learned that his mystery man and Kouki Takeshima were the same person.

"I can't believe it's only been a week," he thought, astonished. He could no longer put off thinking about what he had tried so studiously to ignore the past five days. And he couldn't not wonder whether tonight might be the end of it all.

"What should I do?" He was suddenly scared. Now that Tsukasa Shinozaki and Kouki Takeshima knew each other in the real world, what would happen? He had an awful premonition that it couldn't end well.

Takeshima had focused on his work and acted like nothing was amiss, so he had probably lost interest in Tsukasa now that he knew more about him. Tsukasa hadn't broken the rules, but because of outside circumstances, the game was most likely over. Even if they met again, like they had been doing, reality had irrevocably intruded.

"If I went there tonight," Tsukasa thought, "*and the room was empty...*"

Fear froze his limbs in place. He couldn't just think of it as waking up from a dream. Maybe to Takeshima their relationship was nothing but a game, but Tsukasa had fallen in love even before he had learned Takeshima's name. He didn't want to entertain the thought that he had been dumped just like before.

"No...I don't want to know..."

Tsukasa was so agitated that he could barely organize Takeshima's business cards.

At that moment, Takeshima was in the company car on the way to his dinner meeting.

"So what are your impressions after one week here?" President Ookawa asked him.

"Well, business itself is basically fine. But in planning and personnel, productivity is fairly low. We need to more strongly enforce a merit-based system and motivate each and every person to do their best. Also, there are too many long and pointless meetings."

"You're awfully harsh..."

"You hired me to be harsh."

"That's true, but..."

"In any case, I requested that each Sales Division submit their mid-period sales strategies and their current numbers for review, but no division has complied yet. Perhaps they feel that my request is beneath their notice, but the managers should be able to provide what I asked."

"Up until now, the Presidential Office has handled that..."

"Everybody needs to know how the chain of command works. And I think you will agree that it would be best if I took sole charge of the Jefferson Company project."

"Hmm..."

From the corner of his eye, Takeshima could see Ookawa hesitating as if troubled. He knew that the difficulties he had faced so far were nothing compared to what was coming.

"There's nothing I can do but try," he thought.

Takeshima's life plan had not included this transfer to Dai Tech. Of course, working at a foreign-capital company had meant that the possibility of being

headhunted by another company existed at any time. Before coming to Dai Tech, he had been taken in by a new company twice, and both times had proved to be a step-up and a chance to improve his skills.

But his move to Dai Tech was not something he himself had hoped for. In fact, the whole thing had been out of his hands, so he had had no choice but to accept the transfer.

After the previous president's sudden death, the joint business project with the Jefferson Company had come to a standstill. Now, Ookawa had asked Takeshima to help get it started again. It had been necessary to bring someone in to negotiate with Jefferson's top players and so he had been made "Executive Director of Sales." But at least one of the executives who was unsatisfied with Takeshima's appointment felt that he was overstepping his bounds.

Back at his old job, Takeshima never would have dreamed that he would have new responsibilities added after signing his contract. But due to the current situation, he couldn't blame Ookawa and saw that he had no choice.

"Well, let's do the best we can," he said.

"Sorry..." the old man whispered.

"There's no need to apologize," Takeshima replied.

"Well, the Jefferson Project is in your hands. Choose whomever you want to work under you. And if your current secretary isn't working out, feel free to pick a different one. Konishi recommended him, but there are a lot of people in the Secretarial Division with more experience."

"No, that's not necessary," Takeshima said to Ookawa's proposition, resisting the urge to make further comments. Even though he hadn't chosen this job and his days were filled with various frustrations, the only thing that brought him pleasure was having Tsukasa Shinozaki around. It was true that he was young and inexperienced, but he had a certain kind of charm that was unique to him alone.

Tsukasa was a guilty pleasure that Takeshima could never reveal to anyone else.

"I'm lucky to have such a beautiful secretary," Takeshima said jokingly. "I don't intend to replace him." Even he was surprised by his good mood.

His contract hadn't said anything about the best part of Dai Tech.

"Tsukasa Shinozaki."

Without realizing it, a pleased smile overtook Takeshima's face. He had a wonderful premonition that a delicious new game was about to begin.

Later that night, Tsukasa stood in front of room 2703. He was so full of doubt and conflict that he thought he might just go insane.

"I bet he isn't here."

Even though he was probably going to regret it, he couldn't just turn around and go home. Twenty minutes passed, and Tsukasa still had no idea what to do.

"I can't."

In front of him stood the door to the secret room. He was terrified. But if he plucked up his courage and

knocked on the door and no answer came, what would he do? He had a sudden, vivid image of the door being thrown open, revealing an empty room.

"No!"

Even now, he couldn't brush away the feelings of longing that grew inside him. He couldn't bear it if here, in this hotel, the man he loved told him that their relationship was over. For three months, they had spent every Friday night in this room. For Tsukasa, it hadn't been fake or just a game. His feelings for Takeshima had spilled out into a bewildering reality.

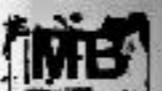
"I'm such an idiot," he thought, shaking. *"I knew this was going to happen."*

Tsukasa should have learned from experience, but his stupidity and lack of judgment when it came to men prevented him from getting a clue. With tears running down his face, he chewed on his bottom lip. He couldn't allow himself to become any more enslaved by this cruel situation. Everything had ended on Monday morning when he had come face-to-face with the mystery man and learned his name. Yet, even though he understood the logic of this, just like the time with Konishi, he had refused to accept it.

"I should just go home," he thought, turning his back on the familiar door.

He miserably decided that he couldn't allow his heart to be broken. Even though his memories of the past three months filled him with so much pain that he felt like he might be ripped apart, he must seal them away.

He ran through the hall, telling himself over and over that this was the only time he was going to allow



himself to cry.

The swiftly descending elevator seemed to mirror Tsukasa's own sadness and gloom.

Chapter 3

By early August, people in the Sales Divisions had become used to "Director Takeshima."

Once people learned that Takeshima had been entrusted with the Jefferson Company project, which had previously been dealt with by the Presidential Office, their opinions began to change. If he could revive the project and make it a success, it would be Dai Tech's biggest and most important contract to date.

Takeshima had begun accepting applications for project members from within the company. Resumes and curriculum vitae flowed in. Because Takeshima wasn't concerned with experience or position, the young members of Dai Tech who were starved for an opportunity saw a chance they had never been given before.

Naturally, as Takeshima's secretary, the job of taking these applications fell to Tsukasa, who was unbelievably busy.

"Twenty-seven people..." he murmured, sorting through the applications that had failed the first round and making files for those who had passed. He spent the whole day trying to put together a schedule for Takeshima to interview each one.

"I'm going to have to do overtime again."

Tsukasa's days had passed by in a blur of frantic

activity. To kill the grief that had taken up residence in his breast, he had thrown himself into work.

Even now, he couldn't stop thinking about that night he had gone to the hotel and ended up running home. He would never forget how, on Monday morning, Takeshima had stood in front of him, his face blank as if nothing at all had happened. His jet-black eyes eloquently conveyed his true feelings.

Tsukasa was convinced then that Takeshima hadn't been waiting for him behind that door.

"Takeshima," he thought, pain welling up within him. He couldn't fathom how much time it would take until this loneliness dissipated and left him in peace. He felt twice as much grief as he had when Konishi had dumped him, and their relationship had lasted a whole year.

But Tsukasa must have become the worst kind of masochist, because he didn't want to leave Takeshima's side. Even if he had to hide his feelings forever, he didn't think he could handle losing his position *and* Takeshima at the same time.

"Hey! You!"

Tsukasa, absorbed in the interview schedule, was startled by the sudden cry.

"Ma-manager Kinoshita?!"

Tsukasa raised his head. Kinoshita, who had given him so much trouble over the past three weeks, loomed over him like an angry demon.

"Is he drunk?" Tsukasa wondered, his internal alarm blaring.

Kinoshita reached out with his huge hands and

violently grabbed Tsukasa's lapels.

"It's your fault that I failed, isn't it?" he bellowed drunkenly.

Tsukasa wasn't entirely surprised that he had been thrown into this frightening situation. Kinoshita had applied to the Jefferson Company project and was one of the many people who had failed to pass the first screening. But unlike the others, Kinoshita had no language problems and had actually worked abroad. Plus, his pride probably couldn't accept that he, a manager, hadn't even been given an interview.

Tsukasa had sent an email just this morning telling Kinoshita that he hadn't passed. Of course, Tsukasa had been merely following Takeshima's orders. But Kinoshita hadn't come storming in here at past 10 at night to yell at Takeshima. Clearly, Kinoshita had roused himself from a drunken state just to take out his resentment on Tsukasa.

Obviously, there were uncooperative people in each Sales Division, but Kinoshita was the worst—he had repeatedly refused to turn in his paperwork and basic data. Tsukasa was sure that Kinoshita thought of him as an annoyance, but yelling at him at work for something personal like this was really too much.

"You think that because you work for Takeshima you're real powerful now, don't you?" Kinoshita yelled.

"Stop!" Tsukasa protested firmly. "Calm down!" He looked at the very large Kinoshita, and knew his scrawny self didn't stand a chance.

"You've been so high-and-mighty since you were part of the president's Secretarial Division. I can't

stand it!" Kinoshita drunkenly raised his shaking fists, making Tsukasa grit his teeth.

Tsukasa knew that, with no witnesses around, it would be hard tomorrow to bring Kinoshita to justice for his reckless actions.

"Shit!"

But he knew he had to at least put up a front of denial and anger, so he looked at Kinoshita scornfully.

"If you continue," a man's voice rang out suddenly, "I'm afraid you won't get just a warning."

The man grabbed Kinoshita's quivering wrists, making his eyes widen comically.

Tsukasa was even more surprised than Kinoshita.

"Director Takeshima?" he said, his voice sounding high-pitched even to his own ears. Takeshima was supposed to have gone home directly from his dinner meeting, so why was he here? But whatever the reason, Takeshima had definitely saved him from a sticky situation. And thinking of their Friday nights together made his body tremble.

"Mr. Kinoshita," Takeshima said. "It's clear just from this situation that you don't have the necessary qualifications to participate in the project. But I'll say it anyway: you failed the screening because I felt that you, as a manager, have a bad attitude."

"What—what's wrong with my attitude?!"

"Shinozaki here requested three times that you submit your mid-period sales strategies and figures. You held us up for over two weeks, and then when you finally turned them in, your comments included no explanation

as to the large increase and decrease in your numbers. Even given the bad exchange rate and the high price of oil, most managers with sufficient business experience would find these figures to be a bit strange, don't you think?"

"What?!"

"Perhaps you thought that an inter-company request that didn't come from the Presidential Office wasn't worth your time, but you could have figured something out. I have no room on the Jefferson Project team for people who aren't prompt and can't adapt to changing situations."

Kinoshita's face, stained red from drunkenness and anger, grew paler and paler.

Tsukasa watched with gratification as Kinoshita stood there silently. He was especially happy that Takeshima had understood why his work had been late. It had seemed like Takeshima wasn't paying any attention, but he had actually been watching out for Tsukasa.

"If nothing else, he doesn't think I'm useless," Tsukasa thought, shaking with joy and relief. He was more conscious than ever of how strongly he felt for Takeshima. No matter how much he tried to drown his loving feelings, they surfaced over and over again.

Kinoshita, on the other hand, seemed consumed by humiliation. "The Jefferson contract has been dead for half a year. I wouldn't even want to be part of such a shitty project!"

Having said his piece, he turned and scurried away. Takeshima coldly watched him leave and then, without saying a word, turned on his heel and proceeded



into his own office.

Tsukasa ran after him. "Uh...thank you..."

Takeshima put his briefcase on his desk and glanced at Tsukasa over his shoulder.

The second that jet-black gaze landed on him, Tsukasa gulped, his heart hammering away loudly. He felt a sudden strange sensation as if all the blood in his body had started flowing in the wrong direction.

He was alone in a secret room with Takeshima.
"Now what?"

His mind ground to a halt. Then, a split second later, he almost toppled over as Takeshima lunged for him.

Tsukasa's strength deserted him and he was pushed down and bent over the corner of the desk. Takeshima tore his clothes off, and then began ministering to the crack between Tsukasa's buttocks in a manner too rough and fast to be called a caress.

Tsukasa gritted his teeth. Pain blossomed as he was invaded.

"Ha...ah...ah!" he panted. It had been three weeks since he had been fucked like this, so hard that his throat soon grew hoarse. It was frightening how good it felt. He cried out again. Somehow, the pain of Takeshima's merciless thrusts was being washed away by pleasure. He realized then just how starved he had been to have Takeshima inside his body.

Tsukasa screamed, drowning in hazy sensations. He felt released, as if nothing else but this mattered.

And so, the night wore on, filled with lust and desire.

"Shinozaki, does Director Takeshima have an opening next Wednesday? He needs to meet with the Judicial Affairs Department," Taniguchi, who was in charge of drafting the contract with the Jefferson Company, asked.

"That won't work," Tsukasa replied. "On Wednesday, he'll be out all day for meetings. Tuesday is fine, though. Should I make the appointment?"

"No, I won't be able to have the paperwork ready by Tuesday. How about Thursday or Friday?"

"Thursday afternoon is fine. Shall I arrange the time with the Judicial Affairs Department secretary?"

"That would be a big help."

"Okay."

The Jefferson project had started under Takeshima's direction, and suddenly everyone around Tsukasa was full of energy. Tsukasa's area was now filled with desks for 10 people and countless office automation machines. It was as lively as the Sales Division where Konishi worked.

The speed at which the project had come together was truly amazing. Tsukasa understood now why Kinoshita wouldn't have been any help. Takeshima had chosen a varied group of people that ranged in age from their twenties to forties, all of them full of initiative and self-confidence. Working with them under Takeshima made Tsukasa's days busy, but fulfilling.

Of course, he had a new problem to worry about.

"How should I act," he wondered.

For one month, Takeshima had been embracing

Tsukasa in his office, while the only things Tsukasa held close were his doubts and worries. Their bond should have ended after just one time, and Tsukasa couldn't fathom what Takeshima's current plan was. Although his body was sated, deep inside, he felt empty. He had finally faced up to the truth of his situation. He just didn't want to accept it.

Two things were different: the location of the room they met, and their relationship itself. Room 2703 had been replaced by Takeshima's office. And instead of being passing acquaintances who didn't know each other's names, they were now boss and employee.

In other words, the game had changed. During the day, they interacted as if nothing was going on. The second they were alone at night, they devoured each other like animals, with no concept of reality. Tsukasa never knew when the switch would be flipped to signal that reality no longer applied, and not knowing kept him constantly on edge. And Takeshima definitely loved the dangerous nature of their game.

"I just keep doing the same thing over and over again..."

Even though he knew what would happen, he couldn't turn Takeshima down. If he refused to play the game, then their bond would be broken. He knew this with a conviction that was painful. Some day Takeshima would grow tired of him and toss him out. Until then, playing their game was the only way to be with the man he loved.

"I really am such an idiot!"

But, even though he chided himself, he was

exhilarated by the idea of spending another night with Takeshima. Unlike the time when they only met on Fridays, now, each second was filled with hope and anticipation, and disappointment that tore at Tsukasa's heart.

When would Takeshima give him the signal?

Each time he was alone with Takeshima in the office, Tsukasa's feelings raged out of control. The signal always came abruptly, without notice.

Tsukasa stopped by Takeshima's office before lunch to bring him some paperwork and tell him about his new appointment. As always, just being close to Takeshima took his breath away.

"Director Takeshima," he said. "Next Thursday you have an afternoon meeting with the Judicial Affairs Department about the contract that Taniguchi is drafting."

Takeshima's jet-black gaze didn't waver from Tsukasa's face. He silently took the papers from Tsukasa and held them at his side.

Tsukasa knew the switch had been flipped.

"But...it's still morning," he thought, his cheeks bright red.

Takeshima smiled at the sight of Tsukasa standing as still as a statue.

"If you're in the mood," he said, "lock the door."

Shame engulfed Tsukasa at this first move in the game Takeshima loved so much. But he had no choice. Embarrassed, he ran to the door and locked it, signaling the beginning of their foreplay. He was already totally turned on.

"All you did was walk between the door and the desk, and you're already almost there," Takeshima said. Tsukasa had no response.

"If you don't hurry and take your clothes off, I might be tempted to make you work all afternoon without any underwear."

Tsukasa gasped as Takeshima brought his arms to his thighs. He cried out when those big hands gripped him roughly.

Takeshima yanked off Tsukasa's belt and helped him step out of his pants and underwear. Even though the blinds were down, it was indescribably humiliating to be in an office in the middle of the day wearing a crisp white shirt and tie on top and nothing on the bottom.

Tsukasa kneeled in front of Takeshima's chair. He undid Takeshima's zipper, pulled his member out, and bestowed a kiss upon it. Takeshima grunted as Tsukasa began to stroke it with his tongue. Tsukasa increased his speed and power, paying special attention to the tip. An erotic and faintly bitter taste filled his mouth.

"Unn...unn..." Takeshima groaned.

Tsukasa heard the moist, lascivious sound of his own mouth sucking Takeshima. He was oddly excited by the dangerous nature of the encounter.

Gasping as if in pain, Takeshima grabbed hold of Tsukasa's hair and wrenched his head away.

"That's enough," he whispered, reaching out with his thumb and stroking Tsukasa's damp bottom lip. "Get up and let's finish it."

Takeshima grasped Tsukasa's arms and hauled him up. He turned Tsukasa around so that he was facing

away and settled him on his lap.

Tsukasa squeaked as one long finger crept between his buttocks and lovingly teased the opening there. Then, he felt Takeshima's staff slowly begin to sink inside, and he shivered.

"No! Don't—"

"Don't worry," Takeshima said. "Thanks to your saliva, it's very wet already."

"Ah...ahhh..."

"Calm down. Just lower your hips onto me."

"Ahh!" Tsukasa cried out at the feel of Takeshima's hardness entering him. He knew that he wasn't sufficiently prepared and it was going to hurt, but he could wait no longer. Not caring about the throbbing pain, he panted as he used his body weight to take Takeshima in even further. A shock of pleasure ran up his spine, making his discomfort fade away. His hips shook.

"Un...ah...ahhh!"

Each brutal stroke of Takeshima's staff inside him only increased Tsukasa's building ecstasy.

"Ah...ah...I'm going to...be ripped apart..."

An overwhelmingly new feeling that was not pain broke over Tsukasa, making him sob. Just from the movement he was making, he was already close to losing himself. Hopelessly excited, he writhed in agony against Takeshima's chest.

"You're such a dirty little secretary," Takeshima said.

"Ah...Di-Director...please...fuck me harder!"

Takeshima's hands grasped Tsukasa's thighs and

forced his knees apart so far that it felt like Tsukasa's hip joints might be wrenched out of place. Then, Takeshima began a new rhythm of strong, bold thrusts.

Tsukasa screamed at the sensation of being invaded. Liquid flowed from his embarrassingly stiff member.

"Deeper!" he cried.

In this secret room cut off from the real world outside, reality no longer applied. Over and over they found themselves in the same dangerous situation. And Tsukasa, totally consumed by Takeshima, was terrified of the end of the game he knew had to be coming.

Circumstances changed in October, thanks to a sudden development with Takeshima's project with the Jefferson Company.

For two months, Takeshima and his team had been trying to carry out negotiations with Jefferson's Tokyo branch. Due to the sudden death of the Dai Tech president, the project had been put on hold for over half a year, and Jefferson wasn't responding well to their renewed overtures.

Takeshima had been brought in to fix the unfavorable situation, but it seemed like Jefferson's Tokyo branch had been inclined to work with another company and that Dai Tech had no hope of gaining the contract. Even though President Ookawa supported working with the Jefferson Company again, many Dai Tech executives weren't in favor of the project. And many employees, like Kinoshita of Sales Division



Three, very publicly voiced their disapproval.

Konishi, who stood to become the previous president's adopted son-in-law, didn't want to be involved in a project that seemed so clearly doomed to failure. He had big plans and couldn't afford even one stain on his illustrious career. Granted, if the project was a success, it would be Dai Tech's most brilliant achievement. But power-hungry Konishi estimated that the odds of the project failing were astronomically high and didn't want to take such a risk until he was safely married to Erina Ookawa.

But in mid-September, Takeshima had thrown all of his energy into taking action. He had known that no matter how hard he worked, the Tokyo branch was too wrapped up in politics and wouldn't respond. So he had used some of the connections he had made during his time at G.V. Consulting and gotten directly in touch with Colin Evans, one of the power players at Jefferson's headquarters in New York.

It was a home run for Takeshima. Things changed at lightning speed.

Evans had been dissatisfied with the way the Tokyo branch had seemed unwilling to make a decision and had been impressed with Takeshima's clear vision. And he had been very interested in the terms of the proposed contract. Under Takeshima's direct supervision, the project had been completed perfectly. He had gained a supporter in the very heart of the Jefferson Company. Takeshima had even personally overseen the signing of the provisional contract in October.

Of course, Dai Tech was thrilled by this

surprising but wonderful turn of events. Those who had been suspicious of the new Executive Director did an about-face. But some were worried that, once the official contract with Jefferson had been signed, Takeshima's influence would grow exponentially.

And of course, Tsukasa, Takeshima's secretary, was excited by recent events as well.

"Wow," he thought, *"Takeshima really gets things done."*

Even though Tsukasa hadn't been as involved as much as Taniguchi and the project team, he still swelled with pride at the thought that he had helped Takeshima make the project a success. Takeshima was worlds away from Konishi, who had expended so much effort not because he cared about his work, but because he was obsessed with becoming Ookawa's son-in-law.

"I used to think Konishi was so mature. I really don't have any judgment when it comes to men..."

Even though his relationship with Konishi had been dead for a long time, Tsukasa still couldn't help tormenting himself for his stupidity. But now that Takeshima had stolen his heart, his time with Konishi had faded away into distant memory.

"How could I have loved a man like that?" Tsukasa thought, shrugging his shoulders slightly and smiling bitterly.

"For someone working overtime in the middle of the night, you sure seem to be enjoying yourself," a familiar voice rang out from behind him.

Tsukasa had come to the break room to make coffee for Takeshima, who was working late as usual. He

nearly dropped the cup he was holding. "Konishi!"

Before him was the man who had chosen his career over Tsukasa, the one he hadn't seen in seven months. Even though they worked at the same company, Tsukasa had figured that he wouldn't run into Konishi ever again. He stiffened.

"You seem well, Tsukasa," Konishi commented.

"Stop. And don't be so informal with me!" Tsukasa retorted coldly.

"Why are you being so cold?" Konishi teased. "Are you still pouting that I had to put you aside for a little while?"

"Konishi!"

Konishi teasingly brought a finger to the tip of Tsukasa's chin. Tsukasa turned his face away, shaking it off. He couldn't fathom what Konishi was planning, but he wasn't going to put up with this kind of treatment.

"What reason could the President's Assistant have to be in the Sales Division at this time of the night?" Tsukasa asked, his amber eyes fixed coldly on Konishi's face.

But to Konishi, who definitely had sadistic tendencies, the lack of welcome in Tsukasa's eyes didn't bother him at all.

"Don't be like that," he said. "When you were about to be fired, I rescued you. Don't you think my kindness deserves some thanks?"

"Fired? That was your doing! What are you talking about?"

Konishi chortled at Tsukasa's displeasure. "I should be congratulating you," he said. "The

only reason an inexperienced kid like you ended up as the Executive Director's secretary was because the executives were all suspicious of Takeshima. But now that his stupid Jefferson Project has gone so well, don't you think he'll be given a secretary who knows what he's doing? Sooner or later, Takeshima won't need you anymore!"

Tsukasa's breath died in his throat. He had known that Takeshima would tire of him and the game would end, but he had continued on even though he had dreaded what was to come. He was such an idiot to be so proud of Takeshima's success, as if he had had anything to do with it!

"He's going to get rid of me."

Their new game of boss and employee had been going on for two months. Takeshima would tire of it eventually, and there was no question that this was probably the ideal time to end it.

"No. Not like this."

Despair swelled in Tsukasa's breast. He felt as if he was about to collapse. He couldn't think. The only things left in his head were his crazy feelings for Takeshima.

"No!"

Forgetting that Konishi was watching him, a cry broke from Tsukasa's mouth. Seeing it, Konishi licked his lips in a snake-like movement and narrowed his eyes.

"Let me guess...you let Takeshima fuck you." Konishi's whisper was full of lewd meaning. "You're so frigid...he doesn't seem like your type."

Konishi walked over to Tsukasa, who was standing utterly still, and placed his hands on Tsukasa's hips.

"I'll make you feel better. I had to do what I could to make Erina marry me, to make her think I actually wanted her. I'll transfer you back to my division and you can be mine again. And if you're a good boy, I'll treat you well."

"No! Stop!"

The coffee cup fell from Tsukasa's hand and crashed to the floor. Sick of Konishi's selfishness, he turned to face him suddenly.

"Let me go!" Tsukasa protested.

"Damn it! Just give in!"

Tsukasa wondered if there was anyone other than Takeshima left on the floor who might interrupt his confrontation with Konishi. But if he yelled for help and someone came, how would he explain the situation? If an employee saw one man trying to force himself on another late at night, all sorts of disgusting rumors would fly throughout the company. If that happened, everyone who had a good opinion of Tsukasa would turn away from him.

And, above all, Tsukasa couldn't bear the thought of Takeshima seeing him in this wretched state, even if he was about to be dumped.

"No way! This can't be happening!"

Tsukasa knew he didn't have the ability to defeat Konishi, who was so much bigger and stronger.

"Get away from me, you asshole!" Tsukasa yelled. He didn't know which was worse: cowering on

the break room couch or crying out and being humiliated. Maybe he should just grin and bear it. Tsukasa made a wordless, desperate sound. Knowing the situation was hopeless, he bit down painfully on his tongue.

"What are you doing?" came an angry roar.

Someone grabbed Konishi and flung him to the ground. Takeshima filled Tsukasa's field of vision. The expression on his face was one of pure anger.

"Thank goodness!"

When Tsukasa looked up, he was met by Takeshima's jet-black glare. His heart lurched, and he had to look away.

Splayed on the floor, a coffee-soaked Konishi looked at Takeshima full of rage. He couldn't bear this shame. Konishi had assumed the Jefferson project would fail, and so he hadn't participated, but its success had only given Takeshima more status and made him a perfect candidate to be the next president. Jealousy and fear burned at Konishi's insides. Even President Ookawa, who had been in favor of Konishi, was suddenly full of praise for Takeshima's achievements. Konishi couldn't shake the feeling that Ookawa's delight might translate into a presidential appointment.

Even though Dai Tech was a family company and Konishi was engaged to the heir, two years remained until their wedding and nothing was set in stone. If Takeshima continued to distinguish himself like this, he might just end up as the adopted son-in-law. And it was only a matter of time before Erina Ookawa fell victim to

Takeshima's charm.

"I've got to destroy him while I still can," Konishi resolved. He stood clumsily up from the coffee puddle and confronted Takeshima.

"So the Executive Director is attacking his employees," he said. "You're really brave. But what happens when I tell everyone that you injured me?"

But Takeshima didn't seem at all concerned with Konishi's threats. "No, *you're* the one who's committing sexual harassment and will have to pay the price."

"Wha-what?!"

Suffering under Takeshima's scornful gaze, Konishi's arrogance spun out of control.

"Sexual harassment?" he scoffed. "Tsukasa here is nothing, but a dirty little faggot. He used to love sucking me, and then all of a sudden he thinks he's a victim? I could laugh! He's the one who will have to pay the price. I bet you love fucking him, but don't think he's getting any pleasure out of it. Even though he's a slut, his ass is so frigid that there's almost no point..."

"Please! Make him stop!" Tsukasa wanted to cover his ears to block out Konishi's shameful accusations, but he couldn't argue the truth of them no matter how much they hurt. Yet nothing hurt more than the fact that Takeshima now knew of his past relationship with Konishi.

Takeshima didn't even look at Tsukasa as he coldly stared Konishi down.

"You're even stupider than I thought," he said.

"Excuse me?" Konishi burst out.

"You probably thought that accusing me of the



same offense would keep me quiet, but that's not how it works. If President Ookawa caught wind of any of this, he'd never allow you to marry his granddaughter. So only an idiot would bring up what he wants to keep secret."

"What?"

"What you do in private is your own business, but you've made a big mistake. You're in a very risky situation here," Takeshima said.

Tsukasa marveled at the totally different reactions to the situation that Takeshima and Konishi were having.

Konishi let out a regretful breath at Takeshima's harsh words. Blood pounded in his head, but he had failed through his own stupid actions and he knew there was nothing he could do.

"Shit!" he said, making a noise of irritation. "You're in a risky situation too, Takeshima."

Saying that, he turned and left the break room, leaving Tsukasa and Takeshima alone in the tiny private space. Unlike Konishi, Takeshima didn't seem inclined to leave. An awkward silence filled the room.

"This is the end," Tsukasa thought. From his place on the couch, he hung his head, unwilling to face what was coming. Even thinking about raising his head and looking at Takeshima made fear streak through him.

Tsukasa stood up from the couch. He had to leave the room before Takeshima said something there would be no turning back from. He didn't want to believe what Konishi had said, but certainly there would be no

better opportunity for Takeshima to get rid of him. Now Takeshima was embroiled in a conflict with Konishi, the ultra-conservative presidential candidate, and Tsukasa had been the cause of it. He had a feeling that he had caused a problem that would have far-reaching effects. Who would want a secretary like him?

"I've given him the perfect excuse to end the game," he berated himself, as he tried to leave the break room. But as he darted past Takeshima, strong hands shot out and grabbed onto his arms, pulling him back.

"Shit!"

The surprise made him look up into an angry jet-black pair of eyes.

"Why didn't you fight him off?" Takeshima asked.

"Huh?"

"If I hadn't come along, would you have just let him have his way with you?"

"Uh...I don't..."

"I can't believe it! How could you sleep with a guy like Konishi?"

Tsukasa didn't know what to say. He couldn't blame Takeshima for being angry, but he had no way to explain away his past with Konishi.

His silence only poured fuel to Takeshima's fire.

"Damn you!" he cried, throwing Tsukasa to the couch again and stalking over to him. "Who else are you sleeping with? How many people at Dai Tech are you fucking?"

"Director Takeshima!"

"Don't call me by my title!" Takeshima yelled.

Consumed by rage, he brought one huge hand to Tsukasa's chest, making Tsukasa's breath catch. Seeing Takeshima like this for the first time made Tsukasa even more frightened than he had been by Konishi.

"Stop it!" he cried, and tried to get away.

Hearing the same protest that Tsukasa had given Konishi leveled at himself, Takeshima lost control.

"Damn it! Answer me, you slut!"

Unable to speak, Tsukasa turned his wide amber eyes on Takeshima. He couldn't change the past, but he didn't deserve to be treated so cruelly by Takeshima. Nor did he deserve the accusation that he was a slut who had lovers scattered all through Dai Tech. No matter what impression he had given Takeshima by sleeping with him in a hotel room 30 minutes after they had first met, it had been the first time that he had done anything like that, and he had never slept with more than one person at the same time.

This current relationship was the deepest, strongest love he had ever felt. What right did Takeshima have to say things like that, when he was the one who enjoyed their game so much and intended to throw Tsukasa away?

"Why? Why must he be so cruel?"

The feelings Tsukasa had tried so hard to suppress rose up then, suffocating him. He had loved Takeshima for so long that he could no longer control them.

"How dare you say that to me!" he cried, barely aware of his actions as he pushed Takeshima away. "You think I'm sleeping with Konishi and tons of other people?"

Are you insane?! You're the one fucking his secretary in the office! You're the one who takes so much pleasure from our little 'boss and employee' game! And you call me a slut?!"

Finally face to face with the parting he had been so afraid of, Tsukasa felt like he had nothing to lose.

"There are tons of people out there to play your games with," he continued. "You might think it's more fun with someone you know nothing about, but I don't! I don't sleep with men I don't love, and when I meet someone I like, of course I want to know everything about him. And even though I know now what an asshole Konishi is, at the time we were together, I really loved him! But since he dumped me for Ookawa's daughter, I haven't touched him once! For six months, I've only been sleeping with you! And if that makes me a slut, then you're a hundred times worse than Konishi. At least he said that he liked me. He didn't think of me as just as part of some game..."

As the words tumbled out of his mouth, hot tears poured from Tsukasa's eyes that were still fixed on Takeshima. They had shared their bodies so many times, but not once in six months had they spoken of their feelings. Now, Tsukasa's one-sided love was about to end.

"I have no judgment when it comes to men."

Tsukasa looked at Takeshima, a strange half-smile visible through his tears. Even knowing that this was the end, his heart wanted Takeshima so badly. The pain tearing at his insides made him cry out.

If nothing else, if their game ended here, at least

Tsukasa could make the final move himself. Feeling that a curtain was falling on their love affair, Tsukasa miserably grabbed hold of Takeshima's collar and pulled him closer.

"Ever since I saw you at that hotel bar, I've been obsessed with you. I didn't care whether we were strangers, or employee and boss...I just didn't want to lose you. I wanted to be with you so badly. But I can't just keep playing this game with you..."

His hot tears made his throat catch and his words shaky. "I've loved you for so long, even before learning your name, and after, too... I just wanted to be near you."

Tsukasa bestowed a kiss on Takeshima's lips that was as soft as a sigh. A kiss which eloquently conveyed his feelings. He had revealed how he really felt. No matter what Takeshima thought of him, he didn't care anymore. He was resigned to being used and tossed away.

Perhaps out of sympathy, Takeshima was silent, unmoving.

Even though he had said Takeshima was a hundred times worse than Konishi, to Tsukasa, Takeshima was still indescribably tempting. Tsukasa awkwardly drew his lips away, feeling a fierce relief that he had avoided the inevitable, for the moment at least.

"I thought you were the one who was enjoying the game," Takeshima whispered unexpectedly.

Tsukasa made to remove his fingers from Takeshima's collar, but Takeshima grabbed hold of them.

"What now?"

Takeshima looked up at Takeshima with angry eyes. Jet-black met amber.

"Ahh..."

An unfamiliar feeling pierced through him, and he wanted to turn around and run away. But when he tried, Takeshima just gripped his hands even more viciously.

Takeshima used his punishing grip on Tsukasa's wrists to turn him around. Tsukasa flinched as Takeshima began to question him relentlessly.

"Yeah, I'm the one who started the game. But the way I see it, the moment we found out who each other was, *you* gained all the power! I was nothing more than a plaything for you..."

"Don't say such stupid things!" Tsukasa said upon hearing Takeshima's accusations. He shook his head, but Takeshima wouldn't let up.

"If what you said is true, why didn't you come to room 2703 that night? I waited until morning, but you never showed! I thought that you had lost interest in me once we were no longer strangers."

"What...no, I—" Tsukasa couldn't believe what he was hearing. When he had run away, had Takeshima really been in room 2703, just behind the door? At work the following week, Takeshima had behaved just like a normal boss, so Tsukasa had felt sure that it had been the end...

"And what's this about being obsessed with me since the second you saw me?" Takeshima pressed on. "I was bewitched by you 30 minutes after I saw you sitting

alone sighing at that bar! I won't lie and say that I wanted a relationship at first, but from the moment in the office when you told me your name was Tsukasa Shinozaki, I fell in love with you! I really thought that you'd come to the hotel and we'd put an end to our mystery relationship and begin a new one as Kouki Takeshima and Tsukasa Shinozaki..." Takeshima's words trailed off, and he looked at Tsukasa.

The day that he had waited for Tsukasa to show up, Takeshima had realized how he really felt. Tsukasa had stolen his heart, even though at first, to Takeshima, their time together had been nothing more than a game. The pain he had felt, when he had thought that Tsukasa had dumped him, had been incredible.

Takeshima had tried to bear it up and continue on, but he couldn't stand to play by Tsukasa's rules any longer and couldn't stop thinking about him. He had lost control and taken Tsukasa hard in his office. Takeshima was bewildered that Tsukasa, who hadn't bothered to show up at room 2703, had delighted in what was basically a rape. Having no clue what to do next, Takeshima had been consumed by his new relationship with Tsukasa, driving him almost crazy. He had thrown away all reason and given his body up to temptation and sweet, sensual pleasure.

"When you ended our relationship in room 2703, but didn't turn me down in my office, I figured that you were the one who got off on the 'boss and secretary' game," Takeshima continued. "I tried to stamp down how I felt for you, but I couldn't! I'm the one who didn't mind playing the game, as long as it meant that I could

be with you..."

Tsukasa felt like something must be wrong with him. Takeshima couldn't mean what it sounded like he meant. If this was a dream, he never wanted to wake up. The very idea that Takeshima knew the pain that Tsukasa had suffered when he had tried to stifle his hopeless, one-sided love...

"No way."

Tsukasa tasted a joy so strong that it almost made him dizzy. His heart pounding in his ears, he grabbed onto Takeshima's neck. They shared a passionate embrace that, up until now, had never meant anything but pure sex.

"Takeshima..." Tsukasa murmured.

In response, Takeshima's arms tightened around Tsukasa.

Tsukasa explained how he had waited in front of room 2703, but had ended up convincing himself that Takeshima had lost interest and wasn't there. Too afraid to find out, he had decided not to knock and had run home.

"If I had opened the door and you hadn't been there, I didn't know what I would have done," he finished.

"Shinozaki!" Takeshima exclaimed.

"I can't help it. I never have any judgment when it comes to men. I always end up with losers who use and abuse me and then kick me to the curb. That's how it was with Konishi. I thought for sure that you had gotten tired of our game and wanted to get rid of me, too, so I couldn't tell you how I felt! If you knew that the man you

picked up in a bar was in love with you, it would suck all the joy out of the game, and it would all be over..."

Tsukasa had tried to seem cool, unaffected by their game, but worry and terror had burned in his breast.

Takeshima, hearing all of Tsukasa's doubts and fears, pulled him even closer.

"You came to the wrong conclusion," he whispered close to Tsukasa's ears, laughing sadly. "But I won't argue that you have no taste in men."

Takeshima paused. "I love you, Shinozaki."

"Takeshima..."

"I'll prove to you that, for once in your life, you've picked out a good man."

Tsukasa, his heart aflame, didn't know what to say.

"Just believe in me, and I'll believe in you," Takeshima said. His eyes, dark and bewitching, gazed at Tsukasa.

As their lips met leisurely, Tsukasa thought he might cry. He sighed, drunk on the hot kiss, sure he was about to burst into flame.

A new, deeper relationship had begun for Kouki Takeshima and Tsukasa Shinozaki.

Chapter 4

The days that followed were full of potent bliss that permeated all the way to the center of Tsukasa's bones.

Now that they had finally come to terms with their relationship, the two of them spent many weekends together at Takeshima's condo. To Tsukasa, there was nothing better than lingering in bed while Takeshima took a shower and got dressed, knowing that Takeshima would be there when he got up.

Tsukasa almost couldn't believe that Takeshima allowed him into his private sanctuary.

"We don't need room 2703 at all," he thought happily.

The night they had finally revealed their feelings, instead of meeting in the hotel, they had taken a taxi to Takeshima's condo. Even now, he couldn't forget the words that Takeshima had whispered into his ear.

Each morning that dawned while they were together made Tsukasa almost burst with joy. But unfortunately, Takeshima didn't have much free time even on the weekends. He often had to cultivate his relationships with clients by playing golf with them. As Takeshima's secretary, Tsukasa understood that it was just another part of Takeshima's job. If no one invited him to play, it would be a sign that Takeshima

wasn't seen as an important player at work. Ever since the provisional contract with Jefferson had been signed, Tsukasa had had to deal with floods of invitations to golf competitions. Inwardly, Tsukasa felt proud that Takeshima's status was rising and he was participating in competitions open only to the most elite company members.

"Tomorrow, a car will come to pick you up at 5:00 a.m.," Tsukasa said on Friday night.

Takeshima was hurrying to a dinner appointment with Sales Division Four and some clients.

"Director Takeshima, you will be on the third team, and will play from 7:36 a.m. onwards. Executive Director Kurita is on another team, but you will eat breakfast with him at the golf course. After that—"

"Stop! That's enough," Takeshima said, interrupting Takeshima's detailed explanation. Clearly, he was annoyed by something Tsukasa had done. "I thought I told you last week not to make any golf appointments for me on Friday."

"But Director Takeshima..." Tsukasa said, bewildered by the grim expression on Takeshima's face. Tsukasa didn't exactly like making weekend golf appointments for Takeshima as well. In fact, he had struggled to ensure that Takeshima's schedule wasn't over-loaded, because obviously, he would suffer as well.

"But, Takeshima—" he said, swallowing his own selfishness and switching into secretary mode. He had to keep a firm hold on his feelings for Takeshima while at work.

"You have to go," Tsukasa continued. "President Ookawa was supposed to play, but he said his hips hurt too much and he specifically suggested that you play in his stead. I don't think you can turn him down. No matter how healthy he seems, he's already 85..."

Takeshima was not impressed by Tsukasa's business-like manner.

"Why do you have to be so cold? If I have a dinner meeting tonight and I'm playing golf tomorrow from five in the morning, I won't have any time to make love to you."

"Wha-what—"

"Am I the only one who thinks that's sad?"

"Ta-Takeshima..."

Although they were alone in the office, someone could barge in through the unlocked door at any point. But Takeshima wrapped his arms around Tsukasa, holding him tightly.

"And I told you to call me 'Kouki' when we're alone together."

Tsukasa didn't know how to respond to Takeshima's sudden change of topic. His cheeks burned bright red. They had made a rule that they would call each other by their first names when they were in private. But they were at work, not at Takeshima's condo. And it was hard to switch back and forth between "Director Takeshima" and "Kouki."

"I'm trying, but I can't help it!"

Tsukasa's face fell as he realized the futility of clinging to his secretary persona. He was annoyed by the way Takeshima just sat there, a sweetly mischievous

smile on his face as he watched Tsukasa's blush grow. Maybe Takeshima liked seeing him speechless with embarrassment and confusion, but Tsukasa felt like he was being made fun of.

"Why won't you call me by my name?" Takeshima asked.

"Um..."

To Takeshima, nothing was more precious than Tsukasa sitting speechless on his lap. But he didn't have time for pleasure at the moment.

Just then, the phone on the desk rang. It was a reminder that the manager of Sales Division Four was waiting downstairs in the parking garage.

"That's too bad," Takeshima said. "If only we had more time."

"Well, I guess you'd better get going!" Tsukasa said, relieved, standing up decisively from his place on Takeshima's lap. He figured that Takeshima would have to prepare for his meeting, so he was startled when he was grabbed again from behind.

"Takeshima!" he cried.

"We'll continue this on Saturday," Takeshima whispered, and dangled something in front of Tsukasa's eyes. It was a key chain with a single silver key dangling from it.

"This is the key to my place," he explained. "Be a good boy and wait for me tomorrow evening."

"Huh?" Tsukasa's eyes grew round as he looked at the key hanging from Takeshima's long fingers.

Takeshima's voice grew husky as he moved closer to Tsukasa's ear. "This weekend, I'll make you

scream my name over and over."

Tsukasa stood speechless and frozen, a blush creeping over his neck as he stared at the key.

On Saturday afternoon, Tsukasa unlocked the door to Takeshima's condo. Even though he had visited many times before, his heart beat out a loud rhythm as the door swung open.

"Okay, calm down," he muttered to himself, knowing that he wasn't doing anything wrong, but feeling somehow timid anyway. It felt strange to use the key to go inside Takeshima's condo when the man himself wasn't even there.

Takeshima's home, as always, seemed lifeless to Tsukasa's eyes, as if no one had ever lived there. Although Takeshima had been residing in Tokyo for over six months now, he had admitted that he only used his condo as a place to sleep. And judging from his personal fashion, prompt work habits, and intelligence, Takeshima probably liked the ultra-modern feeling of the room. But Tsukasa wasn't nearly as neat and couldn't imagine how anyone could live in such a pristine place. How could they relax?

Takeshima had told him to wait "like a good boy" until evening, but now, Tsukasa wasn't quite sure if he could handle just sitting here. Takeshima probably wouldn't mind if he took a peek at the bookshelves or watched a DVD, but neither activity sounded particularly appealing.

"What should I do for four hours?" he said out

loud. It was stupid of him to have come so early with so much time to waste. But he was here now, so he might as well make the best of it.

He finally settled on a good way to fill the hours: he'd go out and buy groceries to make dinner for Takeshima. Usually they ate out, and Takeshima always paid. Obviously Takeshima was older and made more money, but Tsukasa never felt quite right allowing Takeshima to treat him every time. But at the same time, it would be strange for Tsukasa, the secretary, to insist on paying. But if he made the meal himself, Takeshima couldn't protest.

"That's a great idea!" he said, and headed out to the supermarket and food shops.

Tsukasa decided to make cream stew. It could easily be made in one pot with store-bought roux, so the flavor would turn out well no matter what. After shopping, he came home and began cooking, feeling excited to regale Takeshima with a home-cooked meal.

When Takeshima finally returned from his golf competition, his eyes widened at the sight of the table set with plates, spoons, and a basket of sliced baguettes.

"You...made all this?" he asked.

"Yes..." Tsukasa said, doubt pricking at him. He was taken aback by the confusion on Takeshima's face. Maybe he didn't like what Tsukasa had done?

When he thought about it rationally, it made sense that Takeshima wouldn't appreciate coming home to his pristine apartment to find Tsukasa waiting for him like a housewife. Even if they were no longer playing a game, Takeshima still probably preferred a sophisticated

adult relationship.

"I got overly excited," Tsukasa thought. *"I'm such an idiot."*

Tsukasa felt overwhelmed by humiliation. He was going to drive Takeshima away if he kept acting like this. He always tried to impress his lovers, but he just ended up making them lose interest until they finally got rid of him altogether.

"I'm sorry..." Tsukasa apologized. "I didn't think...I guess this is a little too much." He didn't know what to do to smooth over his stupid actions. He was nearly in tears, imagining leaving behind the doomed meal and turning his back on the subdued atmosphere of this lifeless room. When he thought about it, Konishi also had grown fed up with him after they had started spending the weekends together. Was the same thing happening now? Was he coming on too strong?

"No, I'm really happy!" Takeshima said.

Tsukasa, shocked, raised his head and stopped gnawing on his lip. "What?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you think that I didn't like it. I just didn't expect to come home and see this." Takeshima smiled widely. "I had no idea you could cook."

"Once again, he's thrown me for a loop," Takeshima thought. Tsukasa always managed to surprise him, but in a good way.

Tsukasa, so coldly beautiful, looked like a person who would be domineering and selfish. Takeshima had been bewitched by his looks and had approached him at the hotel bar, figuring that Tsukasa was the kind of

person who would have no problem with sharing just one night of pleasure.

But from the moment they had first touched, it had been clear that Tsukasa was much more naïve than he seemed. And while their relationship had stretched on to two and then three times, Takeshima had found himself increasingly drawn to the disparity between Tsukasa's public image and his inner innocence.

This dinner was yet another example. Tsukasa looked like the kind of person who would proudly announce, "I made it just for you!" and expect all kinds of praise. Come to think of it, Tsukasa's beauty and his disaffected attitude had probably brought about the trouble with Kinoshita.

"I should know better than anyone, but even I fall for it," Takeshima mused. Then he remembered his weak reaction towards Tsukasa's dinner, and frowned. He knew what lurked just below that impeccable beauty that drew so much jealousy and attention.

"Oh, Tsukasa. I love how you surprise me."

Takeshima smiled at Tsukasa, who was still obviously bothered by how his dinner had turned out.

"How is it that such a beautiful person has no self-confidence?" he murmured, and put his arms around Tsukasa.

"Confidence? What..."

Being blessed with an attractive figure was probably something he should be thankful for, but it had brought Tsukasa more hurt than he cared to remember. Maybe his life would have been easier if he really was as mature and unattached as he looked. But no matter

how hard he had tried, he hadn't been able to give the men he had loved what they had wanted. He had tried to compensate for their disappointment, but had ended up hated and used. Men were only interested in Tsukasa's appearance, not in who he was inside.

"Is Takeshima any different?" he wondered. He wanted to think so, but looking around at the lifeless room, it was clear to him where Takeshima's tastes ran. Even though they had revealed their feelings for one another, that didn't mean the future was set in stone.

"I have confidence," Tsukasa said angrily. "That's what you want, isn't it?" He knew that asking such a question revealed how pitiful he really was, so instead of digging himself in deeper, he just bit his lip and went silent.

To Takeshima, Tsukasa's unexpected depth, and every move he made, only made him more intriguing.

"You're asking if I like smart, perfect, strong, selfish, fickle, independent men who keep their hearts hidden away?" Takeshima said.

"Umm..."

"I guess that's an ideal, and honestly, that's exactly the image you project. But I never said that was my type. From the moment we met, you consumed me. Whether you're my type or not, I can't help how I feel!"

Tsukasa probably should have been happy to hear Takeshima's words, but he didn't know what to say. Uneasiness spread throughout his breast. As they spent time together, surely Takeshima would realize how very different Tsukasa's true self was from the image he

projected. And then what would happen? It had been one month since they had come to an understanding, which meant that they were verging into dangerous territory.

"And then..."

Takeshima wanted to prevent Tsukasa from falling any deeper into his morose imaginings.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said, placing one finger on Tsukasa's jaw and raising his face up. "Why do you always decide everything is bad and assume the worst?"

"Takeshima..."

"Didn't I tell you to call me 'Kouki'?"

Tsukasa silently looked up at Takeshima, his amber eyes muddied by confusion. Once again, Takeshima was entranced by how different Tsukasa really was from how he seemed, enslaved by his unexpected qualities.

"Hey, looking at me like that isn't fair. I have no defenses against your beautiful face," Takeshima said, smiling sadly and touching Tsukasa's forehead.

At work, Tsukasa was a competent and beautiful secretary who always anticipated Takeshima's needs. But in private, if Takeshima didn't explain everything, Tsukasa was at a loss.

"Okay, so I fell for your looks. When I first approached you, I won't deny that I thought from your appearance that we could enjoy an encounter together and go our separate ways with no hard feelings."

"Okay..."

"But that was half a year ago." Takeshima paused and stared at Tsukasa. "I still love your beauty,

but I'm much more interested in the ways you show me that you're not at all what I thought you were."

"Huh?"

"You constantly surprise me, and I'm mesmerized by you."

At the words he never thought to hear from Takeshima's lips, Tsukasa's eyes glistened.

"But...why me," he thought, unable to conceal his shock. He had worried for so long that Takeshima wouldn't like the real Tsukasa behind the cool façade. Happiness burst through him.

"So stop driving yourself crazy with worry." Takeshima advised. "It doesn't matter whether you're my 'type' or not. If something bothers you, just ask me. You said so yourself that it's normal to want to know everything about the man you love."

"Umm..."

"We have nothing to hide from each other. Show me the real Tsukasa. I promise you, it will only make me want you more."

"Bu-but..."

"Don't you believe me?"

"It's not that..."

"Then let me explain it so you can understand," Takeshima said, his smile teasing as he looked at Tsukasa, who was obviously having a hard time believing what he heard.

"At first glance, you seem as prim and proper as a queen. But on the inside, you're a total masochist," he continued. "And when we're together, you show me parts of yourself you've never revealed to anyone else.

Your whole aura screams 'please punish me!' How can I help myself?"

"What?" Takeshima's frankness made Tsukasa flush with shame. "I don't...say 'please punish me'..."

"You can try to hide it, but your body is screaming it out right now," Takeshima pronounced close to Tsukasa's ear. Tsukasa quivered in surprise as Takeshima's teeth nipped his earlobe. It seemed like the switch had been flipped again. He let out a sweet, throaty sigh, drawing a secret smile from Takeshima.

"Say 'please punish me.'"

"No!" Tsukasa protested.

"Say it!"

"Ah..." Tsukasa moaned as Takeshima's hot lips drifted from his earlobe down to the nape of his neck. Takeshima felt inside Tsukasa's shirt and lightly nibbled his collarbone as he pulled his hips closer and began skillfully rubbing him through his jeans.

Tsukasa yelped. If they continued along these lines, they'd never reach the bedroom. It was embarrassing to think of soiling Takeshima's leather sofa or his pristine white rug.

"Ah...ah...no!"

"What's the matter? You know you love it."

"Stop!" Tsukasa cried out in desperation. But just as Takeshima had said, the more he thought that they shouldn't continue, the higher the flame of his desire was stoked, causing his body to throb. He had never considered himself a masochist, but now that the suggestion had been made, the idea of being dominated made him flush with pleasure. Soon, he *would* be

begging to be punished.

"No...I can't..."

Shame and temptation warred within him. Then Takeshima's hands, which had been bringing him so much sensation, suddenly stopped.

"What?"

Not sure about what was going on, confusion drifted across Tsukasa's desire-hazy eyes as he looked up at Takeshima.

"Can I ask just one thing?" Takeshima said.

"Yes..."

"This isn't all just a performance to make me feel good, is it? Are you just acting like you're enjoying what I'm doing to you?" Takeshima asked bluntly.

Tsukasa was struck speechless. He couldn't quite grasp what Takeshima, who seemed to be experiencing a mixture of reluctance and self-consciousness, was asking. How could he think that Tsukasa would fake a response to Takeshima's touch just to make him happy?

Shock made Tsukasa's eyes wide, and shame and anger rose within. "What?! No way!" Was Takeshima going crazy?

At the sight of the angry Tsukasa, awkwardness and embarrassment spread across Takeshima's face.

Tsukasa had never seen Takeshima reveal so much, and his ire faded. "Takeshima?"

"I'm sorry," Takeshima said, his voice unsure as he smiled bitterly, rubbing his neck. "I didn't mean to sound so strange. It's just...something has been bothering me..."

"Bothering you?"



"The truth is..."

Tsukasa was shocked by Takeshima's faltering words. Understandably, he was still bothered by what had happened when Konishi had tried to force Tsukasa in the break room. Takeshima had been unable to forget when Konishi had let his mouth run and said, "Even though he's a slut, his ass is so frigid that there's almost no point."

"I don't normally make a habit of listening to people like Konishi," Takeshima said, "but the Tsukasa he talked about was so different from the one I know. Since the very first time we slept together, you've been utterly sensitive and responsive, have cried out with joy in such an adorable voice. Even if he was just calling you frigid to be mean, I couldn't help but wonder..."

"Ta-Takeshima..." Tsukasa hung his head down, his face crimson. He couldn't stand the embarrassment, but he was going to have to confess an even more embarrassing truth.

"I'm not pretending," he muttered quietly, his body stiff. "When you touch me, it feels so good, but...until I met you, I had never come from anal sex. It had hurt so bad, and I had always just wanted the pain to hurry up and end..."

"Tsukasa..."

"You're the first one who has ever made me feel good that way."

"I'm the...*first*?" Takeshima said, taken aback.

Tsukasa nodded. "I could hardly believe it myself, that my body could feel like that. I never knew how much I liked being fucked..." Burning with

embarrassment, he huddled down, trying to force his body to disappear. Takeshima's arms suddenly came around him.

"Ah...huh?!"

Without understanding what was happening, Tsukasa was hurriedly carried to the bedroom and flung onto the bed.

"Takeshima?" Tsukasa cried out, surprised by Takeshima's haste and the expression of joyful excitement on his face.

"You can't just say things like that to me and expect me to not be affected. I give up. I can't wait any longer."

"Huh? Wait! Takeshima..." Tsukasa's cries turned into a sweet moan and then a gasp of pleasure. "Ah...ha...."

"More, Tsukasa. More!"

Desire grew hot as the stew cooled in its pot.

Things grew even more exciting as the Christmas season approached. Although Dai Tech focused on imports, it was not a foreign-owned company and so the employees didn't receive any time off for Christmas. Even Takeshima, the Executive Director of Sales, had no respite from his work.

As the year drew to a close, the official contract with the Jefferson Company was finalized, and each Sales Division was chomping at the bit to take the ever-popular Takeshima out to year-end parties and visits with clients. And Tsukasa, who had to single-handedly

manage Takeshima's schedule, was so busy that he believed he might just collapse from the exhaustion.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kitashima, that won't work," he explained. "The night of the 20th was already booked by Sales Division Two. Director Takeshima won't return from his business trip to Sendai until after 7:00 p.m., and then he goes straight to a New Year's party with some of Sales Division Two's clients."

"Can't you make one hour free before the party starts? The president of one of our best client companies is coming to greet Director Takeshima, so we at least have to let him stop by and leave his business card on Takeshima's desk..."

"I see. Let me see what I can do. I'll check whether or not I can change his bullet train reservation to an earlier departure."

"That would be a huge help! And after the New Year, don't forget to give Sales Division One the same amount of time with Takeshima that Sales Division Two had."

"In return, you need to make sure to turn your sales reports in on time. I'm the one in charge of collecting them."

"No problem," Kitashima said, taking mischievous pleasure from putting down his co-workers. "We're not deadbeats like Sales Division Three."

"I don't know about that," Tsukasa replied, shrugging.

At first, no one had thought much of Tsukasa, but since Takeshima had become such a hot property, Tsukasa's status had risen too. People began to appreciate

Tsukasa's willingness to work hard, his perseverance, and his fair dealings with all the different divisions. Many of the young employees, like Kitashima, began to stop by just to chat.

Although his private and professional lives were once again both fulfilling, Tsukasa gazed at Takeshima's jam-packed schedule with quiet dissatisfaction laced with a dose of melancholy.

"The rest of the year is stuffed with dinner meetings and trips," he said out loud. Tsukasa sighed as he stared at the computer screen. Even though it was in the middle of winter, Takeshima had golf appointments every single weekend.

"This is Eastern Japan—why aren't the golf courses closed," he wondered, annoyed by the leagues of old men who didn't seem affected by the cold weather.

But beyond that, the current season did bring Tsukasa some joy. This year, Christmas Eve fell on a Sunday.

"We'll definitely be together that day," he thought to himself, smiling as he looked at the blank space in Takeshima's schedule.

He had hoped to keep Christmas Day free as well, but it was the last Monday of the year so everyone had to work. The day before Christmas Eve, however, was the Emperor's Birthday, so he could monopolize Takeshima for two whole days.

"What present should I get him?"

Tsukasa's happiness was boundless. A year ago, when the former president had just died, he never would have dreamed that so much joy waited for him the

following year. If the whole situation with the president hadn't happened, he would still be with Konishi and Christmas would have been just another unpleasant day.

But this year, everything was different. Perhaps two men couldn't go out and join the tide of happy couples celebrating the holy night on the town, but merely spending two weekend days with Takeshima was paradise to Tsukasa.

"I hope Christmas comes soon."

Like an eager child, Tsukasa counted the days until Christmas while staring happily at the calendar.

December 23rd.

The day before, Takeshima had surprised Tsukasa by telling him to show up at the hotel bar where they had first met, wearing formal clothing and a tie.

"I'll be waiting at 7:00 p.m.," he had said.

Tsukasa, who had been assuming that they would stay at Takeshima's place as usual, felt his eyes begin to sparkle. It was slightly awkward to spend their first Christmas together at the place where they had first met, but it was also romantic and wonderful.

"And if we meet at the bar, not the restaurant, we won't stand out too badly," he thought.

But Tsukasa's predictions were half correct and half wrong. This early, the bar was crowded, but still pleasant as usual. No one stared at him rudely as he walked in. What Tsukasa was surprised by was Takeshima himself.

"My God," he thought as he entered the



room and came to a stop on the floor. His eyes flew to Takeshima, who was relaxing on a stool at the bar.

As Takeshima's secretary, who spent each and every day with him, Tsukasa had grown accustomed to his beautiful face and overwhelmingly manly charisma. Over time, he had actually stopped noticing those things about Takeshima. Now, totally removed from the office environment, awareness slammed into him anew.

"How could I have forgotten?"

Black hair, as glossy and shiny as a crow's wing. Sharp, manly features that seemed somehow exotic. A long-limbed, perfectly proportioned body. And of course, bewitching jet-black eyes that sparkled like the darkest, deepest obsidian.

In the dim light of the bar, it seemed as if a spotlight shone on Takeshima, drawing attention to him and him alone.

"Ahh."

Tsukasa's heart pounded and he stood rooted in the middle of the floor as he vividly recalled the first time they had met here. Takeshima turned and signaled to him by lightly raising his glass of champagne.

As he did, numerous pairs of eyes fixed on Tsukasa. Doubtless, they had been waiting to see what sort of beautiful woman would show up to meet someone as enticing as Takeshima.

"Sorry for destroying your hopes," Tsukasa thought, ignoring the stares as he slipped through the room and sat down next to Takeshima.

"You stand out too much," Tsukasa chided.
"Really? I think you're the one who is too

noticeable. Every single person in this room, male or female, is already in love with you."

"That's not true!"

"Then you're not paying attention," Takeshima said, and placed an order for two glasses of Moët & Chandon.

"We'll drink these and then leave," he continued. *"I want to show you off, but at the same time, all these people are making me jealous."*

"Takeshima..." Tsukasa said, his white cheeks flaming red at Takeshima's bold words.

"Well, it's a little bit early, but Merry Christmas."

Tsukasa clinked his glass against Takeshima's outstretched one. *"Merry Christmas."*

In the time it took to drink one glass of champagne, Tsukasa felt himself brimming over with Christmas spirit. He was surprised when Takeshima set his own glass down, stood up, and *didn't* head towards the door that would take them outside.

"Let's go."

"Huh?" Tsukasa asked. *"We're not going back to your place?"*

They left the lobby and went to the guest elevator. Tsukasa felt confused, but also elated. Takeshima, on the other hand, was both amazed and annoyed.

"You didn't really think that I'd take my lover out on Christmas Eve for just one glass of champagne and then go home?" Takeshima said.

"Huh? But..."

"Are you embarrassed to be seen with me?"

"No!" Tsukasa said, shaking his head fiercely. "It's just that...I'm happy just to be with you, no matter where we are..." His words trailed away and his head drooped.

"Don't say things like that to me," Takeshima said, smiling wryly. "If you do, I won't be able to contain myself."

It was a strange mood for their first Christmas together.

"I reserved a room," Takeshima whispered into Tsukasa's ear. "Let's eat first. And then I'll eat *you*."

"*Takeshima!*" Tsukasa thought, burning with embarrassment. Their love swelled and filled the swiftly ascending elevator.

A surprise awaited Tsukasa when the elevator stopped and the door slid open.

"Huh? Here?"

They stood on the highest floor, in front of a room with a gold plate that read "Royal Suite." Tsukasa's eyes boggled.

"What about... room 2703?" he murmured.

Takeshima smiled mischievously again and inserted his key card into the lock. "We have lots of good memories in that room, but I thought it was time for a change. Come in."

"Ah...okay..." Tsukasa forced his legs to carry him into the room, where he was met by a massive dining table set for two that was decorated with an arrangement of Christmas roses.

"If we get room service, we won't have to worry about anybody watching us," Takeshima explained.

"Yeah, but...a *suite*..." Tsukasa said disbelievingly. Back when he had been part of the president's Secretarial Division, Tsukasa had gone to check out a suite in a fancy hotel that was intended for one of their most important clients, a European businessman and his wife. But he hadn't had the slightest inkling that he would be staying in one himself one day. For someone who had been discarded by so many men, having his lover reserve a suite for Christmas weekend seemed nothing short of miraculous.

When Tsukasa voiced his disbelief, Takeshima was stunned.

"Shit, what kind of men *were* you involved with?" he asked.

"But..."

"That's enough! Don't say anything else, or you'll make me jealous."

"*Takeshima...*"

There was no need for Takeshima to pay any attention to Tsukasa's past with Konishi or anyone else. That Takeshima already knew what had happened with Konishi, yet still grew jealous so easily, somehow made Tsukasa happy. And it meant so much to Tsukasa that the man he loved cared for him so much.

With happiness rushing through his veins, Tsukasa whispered Takeshima's name.

"I can't believe you're so happy just because I reserved this room," Takeshima said. "There's truly no one else like you."

"No, I'm *really* happy!"

"I told you, didn't I? I'll prove to you that



you've met one decent guy for once in your life."

"I didn't need proof," Tsukasa said. "You're amazing!"

"So are you..." Smiling a sweet smile, Takeshima called the concierge and said they were ready for dinner.

For two full hours, the French restaurant inside the hotel brought up a succulent, full-course Christmas dinner. Although a waiter and sommelier popped in and out, Tsukasa felt like he could relax and enjoy his time with Takeshima more than if they had been downstairs in the restaurant overflowing with other couples.

Finally, dessert came.

"Takeshima, what are you doing on New Year's?" Tsukasa asked, bringing a glass of the fine dessert wine that accompanied their ice cream to his lips.

Only five days remained until the New Year's pine decorations would be put up. To finish the contract with Jefferson, Takeshima was scheduled to go to America for 10 days. Tsukasa figured that Takeshima might want to relax and visit his relatives, but he had no idea whether Takeshima even had any family at all.

"You'll probably go see your family, right?" he asked.

A slightly pinched look came over Takeshima's face, and Tsukasa immediately regretted his careless question. "Ah, sorry..."

"No, I should apologize."

"What?"

"The truth is, I won't be in Japan during New

Year's. My mother is marrying a guy who works in France, so the ceremony and reception will be in Paris. Even though we have time off, I won't be able to spend it with you. I'm sorry for choosing my mother over you..."

"No," Tsukasa said, shaking his head fiercely. He was unused to being treated so well by a lover and didn't want to make Takeshima feel bad. "Your mother's wedding is a happy occasion. Of course you want to go!"

"It's not that happy. This will be her third marriage."

"Third?"

"Yeah," Takeshima laughed, shrugging. "She's my mother and I don't necessarily agree with how she lives her life, but I'm her only child so I have to act happy for her no matter how many times she gets married."

Tsukasa was surprised to hear that Takeshima's mother had been married so many times, but he was more concerned with how much he had learned about Takeshima in the last few minutes. Whether because of divorce or death, Takeshima had no father and no siblings. And while he clearly didn't want to go to Paris to celebrate his mother's wedding, the fact that he was going anyway said a lot.

"*Takeshima is an only child,*" Tsukasa mused. He hadn't imagined that he and Takeshima would have that in common. It seemed somehow like a wonderful treasure, and he wasn't at all bothered that between Paris and New York, they would be apart for more than two weeks.

"I kept bragging that I'd show you what a decent man was like, but then I'm leaving you alone for two weeks," Takeshima said. "Pretty awful, huh?"

"No, not at all!"

Takeshima smiled at Tsukasa's seriousness.

"To make it up to you, I'll have to give you two weeks worth of pleasure tonight."

Tsukasa's dessert spoon fell from his hand to the plate with a loud clang. He shivered, wondering if the waiter, who was standing close by offering a milk pitcher for coffee, had heard.

"I...uh...have to go to the bathroom," Tsukasa said, more flustered than he should be. Although he knew that doing so would only make him look more suspicious, he stood and dashed into the bathroom.

"Argh...what am I doing?" Tsukasa chided himself in the large dresser mirror. Even if he wasn't capable of giving a sensible answer, why couldn't he at least act like an adult and pretend that nothing was wrong? He turned on the faucet and used the water that burst forth from it to cool his cheeks that were reddened by shame and confusion.

"I've really done it now."

Since they were already drinking coffee, the waiters would probably stop coming in and out of the room soon. But Tsukasa was far too humiliated to leave the bathroom and face them. He knew he was acting childish, but he needed a bit more time.

The bathroom door slowly opened and Tsukasa saw Takeshima's form reflected in the dresser mirror.

"Takeshima!" he said, looking back in surprise.

"They all left," Takeshima said.

"Oh..." Tsukasa replied, ashamed anew by his immature actions.

"I wasn't really interested in coffee, so I was hoping that they'd leave soon."

"Takeshima..."

"There's a time and a place for propriety, isn't there?" Takeshima said, grinning mischievously.

Tsukasa was happy to note that some of his embarrassment had drained away.

"Takeshima is so kind," he thought. Being treated with so much consideration and gentleness made him almost burst with joy. As if in a trance, Tsukasa submitted to Takeshima's embrace.

"It seems we're all alone," Takeshima whispered sweetly into Tsukasa's ear.

Tsukasa had never had such a wonderful, blissful Christmas. He rested his head on his lover's shoulder as Takeshima's long fingers began stroking his silky hair.

A suggestive smile came over Takeshima's face as he beheld what was in front of him: a freestanding, massive glass shower. Certainly they could go straight to bed, but it seemed a shame not to take advantage of all the suite's amenities.

"Let's shower together," he said.

"Huh?" Tsukasa said, raising his head and staring blankly. When he comprehended Takeshima's intentions, his face flamed scarlet yet again. The two of them had never bathed together, and he knew that if they became naked, it wouldn't end with a simple shower.

"No...it's too embarrassing!"

The floor-to-ceiling glass shower was obviously made for decadence.

There was no way Tsukasa could turn Takeshima down. Water fell loudly from the showerhead onto the granite floor. Tsukasa, still embarrassed, felt Takeshima's large hands trying to turn him around. Water pounded on his head.

Takeshima placed both hands on the granite wall, trapping Tsukasa between them. "If you don't turn around, I can't kiss you."

"A...hh..." Tsukasa's body tensed as Takeshima held him from behind. "No..."

Spray from above pounded on Tsukasa as Takeshima trailed hot lips along the white nape of his neck. Takeshima suddenly slid his hands upwards and grabbed hold of Tsukasa's nipples. Shocked, Tsukasa felt his whole body tremble.

"Ahh...ha..." he cried.

"You like it a little bit rough, don't you?"

"N-no..."

"I can tell that you do."

"Aaahhh!"

Tsukasa's tormented nipples grew hard and erect as Takeshima rubbed them between his fingers. Nearly unbearable sensation snaked through him.

"Ah...aa...nn..." Tsukasa moaned, glad that the shower spray drowned out his plaintive cries. But his relief was not to last. Takeshima's clever hands reached out and shut off the showerhead.

"I can hear you better this way," he said.

A surprised cry burst from Tsukasa's lips.



Hearing his own aroused voice only made him more excited. "Aaa...unn..."

The proof of Takeshima's arousal rose hot and hard against Tsukasa's hips. As Takeshima lightly touched the cleft between Tsukasa's buttocks, Tsukasa's own hardness reared upward, stretching almost to his stomach.

"Ah...ah...n!" he moaned as his hips shook and liquid began to dribble from his greedy member.

While continuing to toy with Tsukasa's rosy nipples, Takeshima nibbled on Tsukasa's earlobe. "Front or back? Where should I touch you?"

"Ah...nn...no..."

"If you don't tell me, I won't touch either," Takeshima whispered with a slightly malicious smile.

"Eh...ahh..." Tsukasa sobbed, readily giving in. "The...back..."

"Good boy, Tsukasa."

"Yaa...nnn!"

Takeshima's long fingers, sopping with body soap, deftly dove into the space between Tsukasa's buttocks and found the small bud hidden there. Spreading it wide, they plunged inside.

"Aa...nnn!"

An erotic, wet sound rang out as Takeshima began moving his fingers. Tsukasa screamed out in pleasure. Each time his inner walls were touched, Tsukasa's staff twitched painfully and honey flowed from the small hole at the tip.

"Ahh...an! Ya...ahh...annn...." Feeling that he was about to lose control, Tsukasa began to plead. "Ah!

More! Please...deeper..."

Takeshima could barely hold himself up any longer when Takeshima grabbed hold of his hips. Takeshima's hardness teased at the opening to Tsukasa's ass and then thrust inside mercilessly.

"A-ahhh!" Tsukasa shrieked as Takeshima drove himself deep inside. His cries of passion echoed from the granite floor and walls to the ceiling. He moaned again as Takeshima boldly pulled him even closer.

Being penetrated while standing made tingles of pleasure dance from Tsukasa's hips to his spine and all the way to the crown of his head. Feeling as if he was about to be shaken to pieces, Tsukasa reached out and braced himself against the wall, clinging for support.

"Ahh...ii..."

Sheathed to the hilt, Takeshima began to gently move his hips. Out of his mind, Tsukasa's starving body took over, demanding even greater pleasure.

"Ahhnn...more!"

"More? Of what?"

"Unn...hnnn!"

Instead of answering, Takeshima moved against the ass that had taken him so deeply inside. A satisfied smile floated across his face.

"I love how dirty you are," he whispered, grasping both of Tsukasa's hands and pulling him even closer.

"Ya...nn...ah!" Tsukasa cried, no longer supported by the wall. Takeshima's skillful, erotic thrusts pierced him to the core. "Haa...nnn!"

The shower was filled with the lewd sounds of

Takeshima's thrusts and Tsukasa's breathy moans. The more Tsukasa reflected on his earlier embarrassment, the more aroused he grew. His desire spilled out in cries that beat against his eardrums.

"Ah...fuck me...harder..." he begged.

Takeshima answered by pounding him again and again.

"I'm...coming!" Tsukasa groaned.

Neither noticed as one day changed into the next, and it was truly Christmas Eve.

Chapter 5

After a very Merry Christmas, the New Year's vacation passed by in a blur and all too soon, it was back to work again. Just as things were truly getting busy, Takeshima headed to New York for his business trip. Tsukasa felt all of his strength drain out of him all at once.

"Ah...he's gone," he sighed.

Tsukasa wasn't personally involved in the contract with Jefferson, but he did make all the flight and hotel arrangements for Takeshima's trip. And as Takeshima's secretary, it was also Tsukasa's job to set up detailed meetings with the New York headquarters and keep in touch with the Jefferson Company. It was a bit of a let down once Takeshima left.

Although Tsukasa was jealous of the three project team members who got to go to New York, he knew that if he went, they wouldn't be able to stick to just business. He was sad to see Takeshima go, but he realized that the best thing he could do as Takeshima's secretary and lover alike was to just wait patiently for him to return.

Even so, having Takeshima gone for 10 whole days made Tsukasa much less interested in work. In the first three days of Takeshima's absence, there wasn't anything for Tsukasa to do and he felt himself losing his

motivation.

"Come on, Shinozaki," Taniguchi said. "When the cat's away, the mice should play."

Taniguchi kept encouraging Tsukasa to take two or three days off, but New Year's was barely over, and Tsukasa also had to think about his finances. And even though Taniguchi wouldn't understand, Tsukasa saw no real point to taking time off when Takeshima wasn't around to share it with him.

"Thanks, but while the cat's away, I think I'll try to get as much work done as I can."

"You're really a hard worker, aren't you?"

"It's my one redeeming feature," Tsukasa joked to brush aside Taniguchi, who put on an expression of exaggerated shock.

Yet if Tsukasa had known what was to come, not only would he have gone along with Taniguchi's suggestion and taken some time off, but he might never have come back.

It wasn't long before a horrible rumor that was making its way through the company came to Tsukasa's attention. On the way to deliver some bulletins to the General Affairs Department, he saw a group of female employees idly gossiping in the hall.

"Hey, did you hear? Presidential Assistant Konishi is no longer engaged to President Ookawa's daughter!"

"Yeah, I never thought that it would work out between him and a 20-year-old college student."

"When they announced their engagement, there were a lot of disappointed people both inside and outside the company."

"I guess President Ookawa heard how badly Konishi treats women!"

"All he wanted was a promotion. What a loser!"

Tsukasa didn't mean to stop and listen, but the women were blocking his path and he couldn't help eavesdropping. He was shocked by what he heard.

"No way," he thought.

But he couldn't quite discredit the rumors. If the young Erina Ookawa had figured out Konishi's true personality before they got married, then she was very fortunate.

"Konishi doesn't treat just women badly," he shrugged, an ironic smile on his face. Even if it was just gossip, there was no more trustworthy source of company information than the network of female Dai Tech employees. And even if the story was somewhat embellished, Yutaka Konishi and Erina Ookawa's engagement was definitely off.

"Whatever. It's got nothing to do with me."

Yet Tsukasa couldn't help the little twinge of pleasure he felt. He coughed lightly, causing the women to turn their piercing gazes on him. Even though he had no interest in females, his cool façade always seemed to draw them to him.

"Mr. Shinozaki? What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "Can I get through?"

Secretly overwhelmed, he kept a bland smile on his face and slipped away from their interested stares.

The next day, the plot thickened. Apparently, Erina Ookawa hadn't broken the engagement—it had been done by Konishi himself.

"What?" Tsukasa said, his eyes wide open with shock. "The former president has an illegitimate son?"

"No way!"

In the short year and a half he had spent as the lowliest secretary on the presidential team, he had heard the former president lament the fact that he had no son to pass the reins to. Granted, that alone wasn't proof that President Ookawa didn't have a son hidden away somewhere that his wife didn't know about, but the very idea itself seemed ridiculous. If he did have a son, why wouldn't he have named him before he died?

"I can't believe it."

No matter how accurate the female employees' gossip usually was, this time, Tsukasa was more than skeptical. But it made a little more sense when he considered that Konishi had broken off the engagement. If the president really did have a son, then power-hungry Konishi would have thought marrying Erina Ookawa was futile since he himself would never be in line for the position.

While he debated what to believe, another more shocking rumor reached Tsukasa's ears.

In a split second, Tsukasa's cool façade crumbled in shock. "The president's son is... *Takeshima*?"

It made for a great story, but who would concoct such a convoluted tale?

"No way...it has to be a lie," he thought, and shrugged his shoulders. Takeshima had said he was

an only child, and would have confided something so important to Tsukasa.

"I'm just bored because Takeshima isn't here. I need to stop paying attention to vicious rumors."

Takeshima would return from his business trip in four days. Tsukasa smiled, hardly able to wait to tell Takeshima about the crazy stories that were floating around. How would Takeshima react?

"Why won't he hurry and come back," he thought dreamily, his imagination focused on his distant lover.

Takeshima emailed every day about work, but in his confidential messages, he would often insert sweet nothings like "I can't wait to come home" or "If I talk to you on the phone, I'll just miss you more." Tsukasa considered writing to him about the rumors, but he decided it would be more fun to tell him face-to-face.

Tsukasa smiled, typed a suitable reply, and hit "send."

"I can't wait!"

At the end of the email, he had written, "It's lonely here without you," something he would never say in person. Tsukasa felt ashamed that he had spent his morning listening to rumors and writing romantic emails instead of working.

Due to the time difference, Takeshima didn't write back until that afternoon.

"I miss you too," his message said. "I can't stop thinking about our Christmas together."

Tsukasa's face felt like it was aflame.

"Ta-Takeshima!" he said out loud, and then

quickly closed the email window.

"Takeshima..."

Tsukasa knew that he should force his brain away from romantic things and back on to work, but his thoughts kept slipping to where they shouldn't be. And thanks to Takeshima's suggestion, he replayed memories of their Christmas together over and over again in his mind.

After their encounter in the shower, they had moved their drenched bodies to bed and made love again and again. The next morning, Tsukasa could barely stand. Humiliation had welled up in him as Takeshima had picked him up, carried him to the huge Jacuzzi tub, and proceeded to wash all parts of him until he was squeaky-clean.

Although he had so carefully cleaned away all the traces of the previous night, once again, Takeshima had forced Tsukasa to open for him. Tsukasa had pleaded tearfully, saying that he couldn't take it, but in the end, their lovemaking in the round bathtub had been amazing.

Tsukasa buried his face, burning with humiliation, in his hands.

"No! What should I do?"

If he kept returning to his erotic memories, he was going to have to adjourn to the bathroom. And Tsukasa definitely didn't want to chance masturbating at work.

Thankfully, the phone rang just then, and Tsukasa was narrowly able to escape his arousal.

"Okay!" he said to the member of the General

Affairs Department, who requested that he come over right away. "I'll be right there."

For the first time in recent memory, he felt excited about work again. In high spirits, he ran to the General Affairs Department.

What awaited him was something Tsukasa could never have imagined. Until Takeshima came back, Tsukasa was supposed to work as the secretary to the president.

"Huh? Why me, all of a sudden?" Tsukasa asked, his eyes sparkling at the unprecedented orders.

"Didn't you hear?" the manager said, lowering his voice. "Konishi broke off his engagement with President Ookawa's granddaughter."

"Well, yes, but..."

"I guess it was a pretty messy situation. Konishi even lost his position."

"Lost his position?"

"Well, they're trying to decide if they should demote him or transfer him overseas, but Konishi will probably just quit..."

From the manager's expression, Tsukasa understood the seriousness of the situation. But Konishi was getting his comeuppance for thinking that he could gain power by marrying a woman he didn't even love, and it was really no business of Tsukasa's.

"But how come I'm filling in for Konishi? And why just until Director Takeshima returns?"

"Ah," the manager said, nodding. "That was President Ookawa's order."

"He picked me?"

"Yes. Director Takeshima has been raving about you at dinner meetings, so President Ookawa thought he should take advantage of such a skillful secretary."

"Really?" Tsukasa murmured self-consciously, still unsure why he had been singled out. He wondered what kind of things Takeshima had been telling the president. Obviously not the whole truth, but he was still a bit confused.

"President Ookawa is 85 years old, but he's a great leader and you can be a lot of help to him. Please do your best to support him."

"I will."

"And as Director Takeshima's star continues to rise, yours will too, you know!"

"What? No..."

"Come on, Director Takeshima is going to be the next president himself!"

Once the manager's words penetrated through the haze of Tsukasa's praise-addled brain, he reacted. "What?"

Rumors he had dismissed as untrue drifted through his mind. And the one saying them this time wasn't a female employee who lived for gossip, but the manager of the General Affairs Department.

"Wait...why are you saying that?" he asked, hoping for an answer that would allow him to push aside all the awful thoughts that crowded his head.

"Why? Because Director Takeshima is President Ookawa's grandson," the manager said, shattering Tsukasa's hopes.

The manager's casual, unconcerned air struck

Tsukasa speechless.

The next day, Tsukasa worked in the Presidential Office. His cool façade was in place and no one would have been able to see just how much confusion raged in his heart.

"Takeshima is President Ookawa's grandson...I can't believe it..."

Doubt had latched onto his brain yesterday and refused to let go. If the rumors were true, than Takeshima was part of the Ookawa family. His heart was a ball of messy emotions.

"But then how come President Ookawa hasn't confirmed it," he wondered gloomily all morning. Unwittingly, the President himself answered Tsukasa's question.

"Shinozaki, can you make a dinner reservation for me on the night of the 17th? Pick somewhere nice that a young lady would enjoy..."

"Are you going out with your granddaughter?" Tsukasa asked, surprised by the request.

"No, no, Director Takeshima is going."

"Director...Takeshima?"

"Yes, with the daughter of the president of Touzai Bank."

"Just the two of them?"

"Of course! They are engaged, after all!"

The world screeched to a halt. Tsukasa froze.

Ookawa laughed, then continued on blithely.

"How come you're so surprised? Everybody's talking

about how Director Takeshima is the son of the former president, which is true. He broke up with Takeshima's mother when she was pregnant, so she kept Takeshima as her last name, but he came back to us once his father died so suddenly."

Tsukasa could barely hear Ookawa's happy voice. He had dismissed the rumors, but apparently, they were true. How could Takeshima be engaged to the bank president's daughter? Whether Takeshima was really an Ookawa or not, he was Tsukasa's lover!

"There has to be some kind of a mistake!"

"We introduced them over New Year's," Ookawa continued good-naturedly. "I was relieved that they got along so well. We'll announce their engagement in the spring and probably hold the ceremony some time this year. It's a great thing for Dai Tech."

This had to be a bad dream. Tsukasa tried to speak, but his tongue refused to cooperate.

"Oh, yes!" Ookawa said, as if something had just occurred to him. "Can you order some flowers for her? Red roses would probably be good. Have them put Director Takeshima's name on them and send them over."

In the distance, the bell announcing the lunch break rang. His fingers frozen and bloodless, Tsukasa couldn't make his hands obey his will.

Tsukasa couldn't remember leaving the Presidential Office, but when he looked around, he was already standing in Takeshima's office.

"No...it can't be...it's a lie..." he muttered in futility. How could this have happened? Up until yesterday, he had been in a state of bliss, happily ticking off on his fingers the days until Takeshima returned on the 15th. How could it all have fallen apart so quickly?

"No...I don't believe it..."

Yet his words of denial had no effect.

"I thought you had disappeared, but here you are!" a voice declared.

Tsukasa turned around and saw the man he least wanted to see.

"Ko-Konishi!" he gulped, and retreated without meaning to. Konishi's snake-like gaze was full of hatred. After what had happened in the break room, Tsukasa figured he shouldn't be surprised.

"This is Director Takeshima's office, not a place you can enter as you please," Tsukasa said firmly.

"Shut up, you asshole!" Konishi burst out. "I turned in my letter of resignation today. Whether Takeshima is going to be the next president or not, I'm not afraid of him!"

Konishi struck the wall before continuing his tirade. "It's all your fault that this happened, you and that fucking Takeshima! How can he be the son of the dead president? If he wasn't here, I would have married Erina and become president myself! Takeshima used you to get to me. He told President Ookawa and Erina that I slept with my employee!"

"Konishi!" Tsukasa exclaimed, disgusted, but unsure of what to say.

"No...no...no," he thought, battered by gales

of strong emotion. He couldn't just refuse to listen to what Konishi was saying. Certainly Takeshima was charismatic and hard working, but he was only 32 years old. If he really was the son of the dead president and the grandson of President Ookawa, it made sense why he had come to Dai Tech.

And if it were all true, then Takeshima was the perfect heir. Konishi didn't have a prayer even if he did marry President Ookawa's granddaughter. Had Konishi ruined his own chances by fighting with Tsukasa in the break room where Takeshima could see? Tsukasa didn't think Takeshima had used him as an excuse, but of course, Takeshima wouldn't want his little sister to marry someone like Konishi. Once he had learned of Tsukasa and Konishi's physical relationship, he had probably kept it to himself, but cautioned Ookawa against Konishi. As a result, Konishi had lost his spot, and Takeshima was ironically in the perfect position to be named the next president.

"I had no idea!"

More than anything, Tsukasa was bothered by the fact that Takeshima had kept all this from him.

"I thought he was an only child... I had no idea he had a little sister..."

Tsukasa felt like he was about to simultaneously laugh and cry. Now that he had given in to suspicion, he felt like he could trust nobody. While they had been so happy together, could Takeshima have been hiding so much from him?

"No! No! No!" Tsukasa covered both of his ears as if to block out his fear. He had no idea what was true



and what was false.

Konishi swooped in for the kill. "What are you so sad about? I don't know what Takeshima promised you, but he's going to marry the daughter of the Touzai Bank president. Don't think that just because he was nice to you he'll need you now. You're just someone for him to fuck, a frigid little slut!"

Tsukasa's heart squeezed and he sunk to his knees. What knocked him over wasn't Konishi's words, but a sudden vivid awareness of what Ookawa had told him, but he only now fully processed. Takeshima had been introduced to the daughter of the president of Touzai Bank. They were going to get married. It was the perfect engagement for Dai Tech's next president.

"He said he was spending New Year's at his mother's wedding in Paris!"

Had Takeshima made the whole thing up? Or did he go to Paris and then meet the daughter before going to New York? Tsukasa didn't have a clue. He was in torment.

"Takeshima," he thought, clutching his head.

Konishi grinned down at him. "Maybe if you work hard to please the future president, he'll keep you on as his mistress. He's so talented that he could probably manage it. You'll be like a pet that he takes care of, but keeps apart from his precious family..."

Konishi's coarse laughter rang throughout the room.

"No...I don't want to know!"

Tsukasa pressed his palms even harder over his ears, almost crushing his head between them.

After leaving work without permission, Tsukasa stayed home. Since the day before, the General Affairs Department Manager had kept calling Tsukasa and insisting that he come to work, but Tsukasa had merely said, "I'm not getting up" and hung up the phone.

Tsukasa understood the trouble he had caused by running out after half a day as the temporary presidential secretary, and he couldn't blame the General Affairs Department Manager for being livid. But he couldn't make himself get out of bed. And even if he did force himself to go to work, the only thing waiting for him there was harsh reality. He had no desire to make dinner reservations for Takeshima and his fiancée. And there was no way he was going to send red roses to her with Takeshima's name on them.

"Takeshima!"

The more Tsukasa thought about the situation, the more convinced he became that he had been living a fantasy.

"It is true," he thought, full of self-hatred. *"I have no judgment when it comes to men."*

Yet he hadn't been blind to Takeshima's nature—he just hadn't paid any attention to reality. After all, Takeshima hadn't lied to him once. Tsukasa had simply become caught up in ecstasy and refused to see the big picture. When he thought rationally, the very idea of a person like Takeshima having a true relationship with a man he had picked up at a bar was ridiculous. Takeshima deserved status and prestige—and of course, a family that he could present to the world with pride.

But Takeshima was basically a good person, so

Tsukasa didn't think he'd be dumped like he had been by Konishi. The fact that Takeshima had showered him with so much attention probably meant that, like Konishi had said, he intended to keep Tsukasa around as a companion, separate from his family, whom he could enjoy in a casual, uncomplicated fashion.

It felt like his heart was being steadily torn to pieces.

"Takeshima!"

The world would never accept a relationship between two men, so maybe Tsukasa should just be grateful that he could be near Takeshima. But he couldn't help what he felt. Even knowing that he was being stupid, he hoped for just one person whom he could love truly and who would love him back.

"I can't share Takeshima with anyone else!"

But if he didn't, he would lose Takeshima...

"No!"

Reality battered at Tsukasa's defenses as he descended even deeper into a pit of despair. Unlike the past with Konishi and the other men, he'd never be able to get past being dumped by Takeshima. How was he supposed to go back to work and pretend like nothing was wrong?

"I can't."

Tsukasa wished fiercely that he could somehow escape from this bitter reality.

Only about an hour remained until they arrived at Narita Airport. While he could still use his computer,

Takeshima checked his email repeatedly, to no effect.

"I guess he hasn't written back," he thought, sighing dejectedly and closing his computer.

The Dai Tech employee seated next to him was obviously confused by Takeshima's unusual actions.

"Is something wrong?" he asked. *"Is there anything I can help with?"*

"Ah...no," Takeshima mumbled self-consciously. He wasn't waiting for a work email, but one from Tsukasa.

"Did I scare him off with my talk of Christmas?"

Three days had passed since his last email from Tsukasa. Maybe Tsukasa was still ashamed by memories of protesting while they made love until noon, but that was no reason not to reply.

"When I see him again, I'll have to punish him," Takeshima thought, his lips curved in a lascivious grin.

He couldn't tell his employee what he was really thinking, so he simply pasted a pleasant smile on his face and said, "No, that's alright. We're landing soon, and it's not a big deal."

The business trip to finalize things with the Jefferson Company could not have gone more smoothly. Yet Takeshima had no inkling of the problems that awaited him at work, poised to destroy everything.

When Takeshima entered Dai Tech, he noticed that Tsukasa was nowhere to be seen.

While the members of his project team stood and greeted him with "Welcome back!" and "Good

work," his eyes searched for Tsukasa.

"Where is he?"

Takeshima wondered if Tsukasa had chosen a bad moment to be away from his desk, but 30 minutes later, there was still no sign of him. On the way to the Presidential Office to report about the contract, Takeshima couldn't wait any longer.

"Taniguchi," he said. "What happened to Shinozaki?"

"Shinozaki...uh, he's taking a day off."

"Day off? Did he catch a cold or something?"

"I'm not sure..."

Takeshima was suspicious of Taniguchi's strange answer, but the Presidential Office summoned him and he had to go.

Everything became clear to him 10 minutes later after Takeshima finished giving his report.

"Anyway, Kouki, you know that Shinozaki guy you always raved about? I borrowed him for a while and he was a huge disappointment!" President Ookawa said, his expression severe.

"Shinozaki...a disappointment?" Takeshima said, shocked. "Why on Earth did you borrow him while I was gone?"

"After the whole thing with Erina, Konishi quit. He was the main secretary to your father, and then my assistant, so I needed someone to fill in for him in the Secretarial Division and help me out a bit."

"So why did you have to take my secretary?"

"I'll never borrow him again. What a useless young man. He left one afternoon without even telling

me, leaving the arrangements for the restaurant and the flowers undone..."

"What? What do you mean restaurant and flowers? Are they for Erina?"

"What are you talking about? They're for the daughter of the Touzai Bank President, of course! I already told them that the day after tomorrow you would choose a restaurant and go pick her up," Ookawa said casually.

Takeshima narrowed his eyes at the old man. He was already angry that Ookawa had borrowed Tsukasa and then called him useless, but trying to set up dates for Takeshima was the last straw.

"Stop this!" he yelled. "I told you I wasn't interested in becoming involved with that girl. Yet you still insisted on sending her to Paris. How dare you?"

"I thought you had fun together," Ookawa said. "Didn't you have dinner and go to an art museum?"

"Don't be ridiculous! You made her come all the way to Paris to see me, so of course I had to take her out to eat and show her around a bit."

"Oh."

"You can call them yourself and tell them that I won't be taking her out the day after tomorrow. And I have absolutely no interest in marrying her!"

"No! Kouki, wait," Ookawa pleaded.

Takeshima glanced back at him, and then stalked angrily out of the room.

"God! What does he think he's doing?"

Back in his own office, Takeshima was still full of anger and irritation. After hearing the rumors being

passed around through Dai Tech about his own origins and his upcoming promotion, Takeshima realized that in only 10 days, things had become dire.

Yet he only cared about one thing: the fact that Tsukasa was missing.

"Shit!"

He gritted his teeth and stood up.

"I'm sorry," he announced. "I have to go."

Ignoring his surprised employees, he quickly made his exit.

Chapter 6

The sun was sinking quickly, plunging the world into darkness. From the inside of the taxi, which was speeding through the chilly night on the way to Tsukasa's condo, Takeshima remembered the events of the year that had just passed.

It had all begun when his mother had called him from Paris and revealed that his father, whom she had divorced before he was born, had passed away. Takeshima had wondered why she was telling him now, but he had happened to be in Tokyo for work and figured he should at least go to the funeral.

Looking back, he realized that signing the guest book had been a mistake. President Ookawa had seen his signature and contacted him the next day. Takeshima hadn't been able to deny the old man's request to meet his grandson. But it had turned out that Ookawa wanted more than just a family connection—he wanted Takeshima to come use his talents to help Dai Tech during a difficult time.

He had turned Ookawa down at first, but the old man had been persistent. After five months of conflict, Takeshima, who didn't believe in mixing family affairs with business, had been persuaded to come to Dai Tech and wrap things up with the Jefferson Company. The plan had been for him to stay until Erina graduated

from college in two years, and never once had Ookawa mentioned leaving the company to Takeshima. There was absolutely no way he would marry the daughter of the main bank's president just for the good of the company.

"This is exactly why I didn't want to come to Dai Tech!"

Even though Ookawa was a respectable 85-year-old, he still had no right to meddle in anyone else's life. Still, Takeshima didn't regret taking the job, because he had gained an intimate relationship with Tsukasa. Yet Tsukasa had stopped coming to work and was probably holed up in his house. All Takeshima knew was that everything stemmed from Tsukasa's misunderstanding.

"He's certainly high-maintenance."

Takeshima knew that Tsukasa hadn't done anything wrong, but he was still outraged by the whole thing. He couldn't wait to see Tsukasa.

Outside the taxi window, snow was falling.

Takeshima stood looking at the nameplate on room 302 that read "SHINOZAKI" and brutally banged on the door.

"Hey! Open the door, Tsukasa!" he yelled angrily, sure that he was going to upset the neighbors and not caring at all.

Tsukasa had planned to pretend that he wasn't home, but he gave up after five minutes of pounding noise.

"Stop! Go home!" he cried, cracking the door

open a few centimeters.

"Grow up and let me in!" Takeshima said, sticking his foot in the gap between the wall and the door and wrenching it open.

Tsukasa gasped, knowing that he wasn't strong enough to stop Takeshima from coming inside. He retreated, but Takeshima strode right up to him.

"Do you know why I'm here?" he said.

"Ta-Takeshima..."

"I'm here to yell at you, *you idiot!*" Takeshima said so loudly that Tsukasa thought his eardrums might shatter.

Horrified, Tsukasa had no clue what he had done to deserve such a reaction.

Takeshima grabbed Tsukasa with his strong arms and pulled him close, running his lips along Tsukasa's ear.

"Don't you see how angry I am?" he whispered, his ire giving way to sweet kindness.

"Takeshima..."

"How could you think that I'd marry the bank president's daughter?"

"I—"

"After what we shared on Christmas, don't you realize how much I love you?" Takeshima murmured.

Tsukasa flushed red. He had been blissfully happy until the other day.

"I can't leave you alone, can I? After only 10 days apart, you're already worrying yourself to death." Takeshima laughed huskily.

Tsukasa looked up into Takeshima's face.

"But...you kept so much from me..."

"Oh."

"I didn't think you were going to get rid of me, but I thought...that you might get married anyway..."

"You thought I'd marry her and still be your lover?"

"Yeah..."

"Are you an idiot?" Takeshima chuckled. "I'm not nearly talented enough to make love to you and then go home and sleep with my wife."

Takeshima stared at Tsukasa and divulged the truth behind all the lies and rumors making the rounds at Dai Tech, and how President Ookawa had forced him to meet the girl.

"Yes, I'm the son of the former president," he continued, "and President Ookawa is my grandfather. But I'm not going to inherit the company or marry the bank president's daughter, and I'm going to leave after Erina graduates. Once I knew what Konishi was like, I didn't want her to marry him, so I urged Ookawa to put a stop to it. But you know I wasn't involved with you just to get to Konishi."

"Uh...okay, but..."

"It was wrong of me not to confide in you." Takeshima paused. "But I told you before that if you were worried about anything, you should just ask me. Even though I was in New York on a business trip, you could have called me and I would have explained everything. Yet you just decided that things were bad and ran away."

"Oh..."

"It's just like the time you ran away from room 2703. Had you just knocked on the door, I would have answered. You gave up without even finding out, which really pissed me off. That's why I yelled at you. I'm sorry."

"Takeshima..."

"Just stop worrying and believe in me. I told you that for once in your life, you *had* met a decent guy, didn't I?" Takeshima teased.

The emotions swirling in Tsukasa's breast made his body grow warm. "Okay!"

Tsukasa felt ashamed over his negative experiences that made him too cowardly to believe in Takeshima, whose feelings were actually true. How could he have doubted the man who treated him so kindly, loved him so completely?

"I'm sorry," he said. "I knew you loved me, but I couldn't stand the thought of sharing you! I want you all to myself. But I thought if I told you that, you'd hate me. I was just scared. And I'm a man...I figured that someone in your position would have to marry sooner or later..." Tsukasa blabbered timidly, strong emotions shaking him as he was held tight against Takeshima's chest.

Takeshima smiled sweetly. "I want you all to myself, too."

"Takeshima..."

"And I like the idea of belonging *only* to you."

Takeshima's lips dived down and captured Tsukasa's in a tender kiss. Tsukasa's mind went blank and his knees weakened as their tongues danced around

each other.

"I love you..." Tsukasa whispered, wrapping both arms around Takeshima's strong neck.

"Tsukasa..."

"Ah...Takeshima..."

Entwined together, the two of them collapsed to the floor. Tsukasa knew it was brazen to have sex here in the entryway without even locking the door, but he wanted Takeshima too badly to make him stop.

"Please!" he cried. "Make love to me! Be mine only!"

"Tsukasa..." Takeshima smiled at Tsukasa's desire. "Don't worry. I'm all yours."

Tsukasa, his body splayed out on the floor, moaned as Takeshima removed his clothing. The cold January evening made goosebumps rise on his porcelain-white skin, but the fever of desire racing through him gave it a rosy flush.

"I'll warm you up," Takeshima said, raining kisses down all over Tsukasa's body. He laved Tsukasa nipples that were standing up from the cold, while his hand searched between Tsukasa's legs for the tight bud of his anus.

"You're so tight," he said, caressing Tsukasa for the first time in 10 days. "When I was gone, did you pleasure yourself?"

"Ahh..." Tsukasa cried, sensation throbbing through him as Takeshima lightly touched around his opening. Knowing how immodest he looked, his hips shook and his painfully erect member twitched. He didn't care how much it hurt—he wanted Takeshima to

take him hard, immediately.

Takeshima smiled humorlessly at Tsukasa's tormented body. "It's been a while, hasn't it? If you keep tempting me like that, I won't be able to hold back."

"Ahh...ha...but..."

"Let me get you a little bit more ready," Takeshima said, barely able to restrain himself, but unwilling to inflict the slightest amount of damage on Tsukasa's delicate little opening. He spread Tsukasa wide and pressed both knees to his chest, baring him to his gaze. Then, he bent down and kissed Tsukasa's entrance.

Tsukasa shrieked, shock and pleasure mingled in his voice. "Don't! It's not clean!"

"Of course, it is. Even inside, you're the nicest shade of pink."

Tsukasa moaned as Takeshima's hot tongue caressed him. He nearly shattered apart as the tip of it delved inside.

"Ah...ha...please...I'm going to come," he pleaded.

Takeshima merely took one long finger and inserted it into Tsukasa's moistness as if to confirm that he was ready. Then he raised Tsukasa's body up for even better access and guided himself inside, unable to wait any longer.

"Aa...ahh!" Tsukasa cried out his release. "I'm sorry!"

"Don't worry. I'm going to make you come over and over."

"Ahh...ha..." Tsukasa panted as Takeshima

nudged him into a sitting position, their fronts facing, their bodies still joined. "Deep...er..."

Tsukasa removed his arms from Takeshima's neck and brought them to his hips. As Takeshima began a rhythm of strong, deep strokes, Tsukasa's spent member reared back to life.

"Aaaah...I'm coming...again!"

"Tsukasa!"

"Aaaahhh..."

The exquisite sensation made Tsukasa explode. All thoughts deserted him. Yet, even as Tsukasa convulsed with pleasure, Takeshima began moving again. Tsukasa could feel Takeshima's cock swelling and growing even larger inside him.

"One more time," Takeshima said.

"Aa...ha..."

Passion and desire swelled as, outside, the drifting snow turned the landscape white.

Spring came.

In April, Tsukasa blushed as he looked at the paid time off sheet for the upcoming year that he had just received from the General Affairs Department. He had 12 days off this year, which, with the holdover from last year, came to 30 days total.

Last year, he hadn't taken a summer vacation, but he had stayed home for five days in a row after the incident with Takeshima's supposed marriage. The first three days were before he had reconciled with Takeshima. The following two days, Tsukasa had been



laid up with a cold and high fever.

It had been January 15th, right in the midst of a cold winter, and Tsukasa had been totally naked and sweaty on the floor for several hours. Of course he had caught a cold, and although he didn't go anywhere fun, he still ended up being away from work for five whole days.

"That was horrible," he thought, still embarrassed by his unprofessional behavior.

Takeshima had told everyone that Tsukasa had the flu, so in the end, all five days had been excused. Takeshima had even smoothed things over with President Ookawa, whom Tsukasa had caused so much trouble for. Consequences had been avoided, but looking at the paper in front of him, Tsukasa was reminded of his shame anew.

"I have no control when it comes to Takeshima, body or soul," he chided himself, happy and annoyed at the same time by his recollections. Without meaning to, his face relaxed, and he gave a relieved shrug.

"What are you grinning about all by yourself?" Takeshima asked as he returned from his meeting.

"Director Takeshima!" Tsukasa cried.

"Never mind that..." he said, hurrying after Takeshima into his office.

The contract with Jefferson had brought Takeshima much prestige, but also produced even more work than before. It was whispered that at the stockholder meeting in June, his tremendous contributions would be honored and he would be named Vice-President of the Executive Board. But Takeshima, who intended to leave

Dai Tech in a year, was not pleased by the prospect.

Takeshima arrived at his desk.

"Um...do you really intend to quit?" Tsukasa blurted out.

"Of course. It's one thing at a small shop, but I've always believed that big companies run by the same family will eventually fall apart," Takeshima said lightly. "President Ookawa, as a shareholder, should put the future of the company first and find someone else who can do a better job."

That made sense, but Takeshima's feelings were complicated. Even though they were lovers, if Takeshima quit, then Tsukasa could no longer be his secretary. And if Takeshima got a job at another foreign-capital company, he might even have to work overseas...

"What would I do?" Tsukasa wondered.

Nothing would change for another year, but Tsukasa couldn't stop thinking about it. It was his bad habit to worry himself crazy, and the more he loved someone, the more his worries grew. Maybe that was just the nature of love.

"Is Takeshima worried about leaving me behind?"

It seemed Takeshima was also concerned. He grabbed Tsukasa's hands that had been outstretched to offer him some business papers, pulled Tsukasa close, and settled him on his lap.

"Ah-wait!" Tsukasa cried.

Takeshima just smiled mischievously and looked at Tsukasa. "If I leave Dai Tech, we won't be able to do this any more."

"Ta-Takeshima!"

"If you want to continue our forbidden office love, why don't you quit with me?"

Even knowing that Takeshima was joking, Tsukasa was struck speechless.

But Takeshima was serious. Tsukasa's language skills and his secretarial skills could be of use anywhere, not just Dai Tech. And if Takeshima became established somewhere new, maybe he could hire Tsukasa himself. He wouldn't force Takeshima to derail his career plans just for him, though. When the time was right, they could talk about the future.

But there was one thing Takeshima wanted to propose right now.

"Hey, what do you say about living together?"

"Huh?" Tsukasa thought, his mouth refusing to voice a response. Disbelief made his amber-hued eyes open impossibly wide.

"Please move in with me, Tsukasa," Takeshima repeated, changing his tactics. "I want you all to myself—morning, noon, and night."

"Takeshima!"

Happiness made Tsukasa's body shiver, and tears spilled from his eyes. He nodded dreamily, unable to speak as he drowned in Takeshima's jet-black gaze.

For Tsukasa and Takeshima, who had started out not even knowing each other's names, a new future was dawning.

END

Afterword

Hi, Yuiko Takamura here.

First of all, thank you all for reading! Just like my previous novel, *Caged Slave* has a very adult tone and I hope everyone enjoyed it!

Love at first sight would never work like this in the real world (ha ha!), but as an author, I'm really relieved that Takeshima and Tsukasa were able to turn their physical relationship into something much deeper.

I want to voice my deepest thanks to An Kanae for her beautiful illustrations of Takeshima and Tsukasa. She was able to create something really wonderful on a ridiculously short notice! And even though I wrote the story, I find Tsukasa's poignant expressions really moving.

Anyway, I would be really happy and inspired if you dropped me a note, letting me know what you thought!

Lately, I've been really bad and have been writing at a glacial pace. But next year (by the time this book is out, it will be this year), my work will be in *Novel Aqua*, a magazine put out by *Ookura Publishing*. I'm working really hard, so if you're interested, make sure to pick it up!

Until the day we meet again—

Yuiko Takamura

November 2006

